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THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH

VOL. II

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES, INDEXES, ETC., ETC.

By VARIOUS AUTHORS

In Twenty-One Volumes

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ON THE PROPHECIES OF

ISAIAH

VOL. II

BY

R. A. BERTRAM

Author of "The Homiletic Encyclopedia," etc., etc.

AND

ALFRED TUCKER

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ERRATA.

Page 116, line 3 from the bottom: *omit* "all."
„ 117, line 4 from the top: *for* "And makes a heaven, a heaven" *read* "And makes a heaven of heaven."
„ 184, line 16 from the bottom: *read* "Luke xi. 13, with Matt. vii. 11."
„ 187, line 18 from the bottom: *omit* "the."
„ 359, line 29 from the bottom: *read* "bill."
„ 487, line 17 from the top: *read* "157."
„ 569, line 9 from the top; *for* "III." *substitute* "3."

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

ISAIAH.

Comfort for the Suffering.

xl. 1–5. *Comfort ye, &c.*

It is generally agreed that these last twenty-six chapters relate to the restoration of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon. They are the Gospel of the Old Testament. This is their value to us.

Put into the briefest words, the ideas contained in the first five verses of this chapter are—That a glorious change awaits the exiles, consisting of a new and generous manifestation of Jehovah's presence, for which His people are exhorted to prepare.

The prophet is commanded to speak words of comfort to those captives from Jerusalem—to assure them that her warfare, her time of slavery, is about to end; that her sins are pardoned, abundantly expiated by her sufferings; that her God is coming to deliver her from the oppressor; and that she must prepare the way for His coming, as heralds ride before a conquering king.

The comforting announcement which the prophet was to make to Jerusalem was—1. That her affliction had become full, and had therefore come to an end. 2. Her iniquity is atoned for and the justice of God is satisfied. 3. The third clause repeats the substance of the previous ones with greater emphasis and in a fuller tone.

The double punishment which she had endured is not to be taken in a judicial sense, in which case God would appear over-rigid, and therefore unjust. The compassion of God regarded what His justice had been obliged to inflict upon Jerusalem as superabundant.

But this is only the negative side of the consolation. What positive salvation is to be expected? "Hark, the voice of one crying!" The summons proceeds in a commanding tone: "Let every valley be exalted," &c. Spiritually interpreted, the command points to the encouragement of those that are cast down, the humiliation of the self-righteous and self-secure, the changing of dishonesty into simplicity, and of haughtiness into submission. Israel is to take care that God shall find them in such an inward and outward state as shall enable Him to fulfil His purpose. "And the glory of Jehovah," &c. When the way is prepared for the coming One, the glory of the God of salvation will be unveiled; and this revelation is made for the sake of Israel, but not secretly or exclusively, for "all flesh" will come to see the salvation of God. "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," is the confirmation of the foregoing prophecy.

Suffering endured through a long period, comfort promised, the elements of that comfort and the preparation

for receiving it—these are the chief thoughts and main topics of the passage.

I. We all have to suffer, and to suffer for our own sins and for the sins of one another, in one way or another, and in a greater or less degree. It is part of the mystery of the world that some lives, even in the morning of their days, are overhung with dark clouds of sorrow. With how many is life a continual struggle with feeble health; in others, mental cares, cares of business, anxieties; in others, pangs suffered over sins committed and things left undone.

II. The Old and New Testaments say that there is Divine comfort for the sorrowful sufferers. This teaching casts a new light upon human grief. It puts to shame all ancient and modern philosophy. The Divine Physician uses suffering as a medicine (Ps. cxix. 67, 71). 1. We feel ourselves drawn into the true path of life. 2. Then the comfort of another message begins to be felt—that our iniquity is pardoned. 3. Then His spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

III. God is coming over the desert of our lives to reveal His glory to us (ver. 5)

IV. But, for coming into the possession of this privilege, we must prepare the way of the Lord (ver 4; Matt. iii. 2). The *conditions* of comfort are here laid down. Christian comfort comes by raising up the whole soul of a man; by bringing down every proud thought; by straightening every crooked course; by chastening and refining all that is rugged in character or conduct. It is thus we prepare ourselves for the incoming of God.—*Charles Short: Sermons*, pp. 255–269.

The Lord's People Comforted.

xl. 1. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.*

I. God has a people in the world. In one sense, all whom the Lord designs to create anew by His Holy Spirit, and who, though at present afar off, will at length be brought nigh unto Him, are *His* people (Acts xviii. 10). But these are not the persons referred to in our text, for they cannot at present be known or addressed as God's people; neither at present are they capable of being comforted, according to the direction here given. The "people" to whom the text refers are those who have fled to Christ for refuge from the wrath to come, and who are earnestly desiring to walk in newness of life.

II. It is the will of God that His people should enjoy the comforts of religion. The very nature of the religion He has given is to inspire comfort, as it is the very nature of the sun to diffuse light and heat. If His people are sorrowful or dejected, it is not because of their religion, but because they have too little religion, or because they do not know how to use the religion which they have. But it is desirable that they should be comforted—1. *For their own sakes.* While they lack peace and joy they can never be as diligent as they ought to be in the duties of religion (H. E. I. 306–308). 2. *For the honour of religion.* The despondency and gloom of professors affords a handle to those who speak evil of the Christian life, and misrepresent it as a life of melancholy (H. E. I. 756–762). For these reasons God's people should lay aside all unreasonable fears, and preachers of the Gospel should consider it an essential part of their office to minister to the people of God that consolation which belongs to them, and which they are capable of receiving. "Comfort ye," &c.

III. Let us examine a few of the most common causes of that want of comfort of which God's people frequently complain.

1. *Their misunderstanding the nature and extent of that pardon of sin which the Gospel provides.* Reclaimed from a

worldly course, the recollection of their former sins is very painful to them. It often overspreads their minds like a thick cloud, and fills them with darkness and alarm. They are not indeed without a hope that they shall obtain forgiveness *at last* for Christ's sake; but still they ask themselves, "What if God should *not* pardon me at last?" (H. E. I. 1268). But God does not offer to pardon you at some distant day. He offers, in the Gospel, to forgive you *now;* nay, He tells you, that if you have in your heart come to Christ and believed in Him, your sins are already forgiven (Rom. viii. 1; Luke vii. 47; Col. ii. 13; 1 John ii. 12; Isa. xliv. 22). The pardon vouchsafed is a *present* pardon (H. E. I. 2332–2339). When the prodigal returned to his father's house a penitent, were not his offences fully and instantly forgiven and his self-reproaches stopped? Was he told, amid all the pleasures of the feast provided for him, that he must not enjoy himself *too much*, because perhaps his father might some years afterwards remember his past misconduct and visit it upon him? An apprehension of this kind would doubtless have much diminished his comfort; but would it not have been groundless and unreasonable? Equally groundless and unreasonable are your apprehensions, if you have indeed come to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Put them away and rejoice in a present salvation (2 Cor. iv. 19; John v. 24).

2. *Their seeking comfort where it is not to be found.* It is one of their privileges that they are renewed in the spirit of their minds, but this renewal is not, and cannot be, at present perfect. But they forget this, and when they look within themselves they find so many imperfections that they are greatly distressed. If you are never to partake of the peace and consolations of Christianity so long as you fall short of the spiritual standard of obedience, you must go mourning all your days: *for the more spiritually-minded you grow, the more spiritual will that standard become in your estimation, and consequently the more unholy you will appear in your own eyes.* You can never find comfort by poring into your own heart. Peace and joy come *by believing.* Christ is the only source of consolation to the soul. If you wanted light, would you expect to find it by looking downwards on the ground, or upwards to the sun? Would the Israelite, when bitten by the serpents, have found relief by meditating on his wounds and lamenting the violence and deadly nature of his disease? No; it was by looking on the serpent of brass that he found a cure, and had his heart filled with hope and joy. *Look unto Jesus,* rejoice in the sufficiency of His grace to redeem you from all evil (Jude 24; H. E. I. 4470–4474).

3. *Their mistaking the proofs and marks of a really religious state.* They say, "If we were the Lord's people, we should *feel* it in our hearts." But who has told you that warm and rapturous feelings are sure proofs of a truly religious state? (1.) As a matter of fact, they are really reasons for suspicion when they are experienced at the outset of a religious life (Matt. xiii. 5). There is a religion that is like a bundle of thorns on fire; for a little time there is noise and light and some measure of heat, but presently the flame subsides, the fire goes out, and all is dark and chill. (2.) Even when feelings are real, it is not possible for them to be long wound up to one high pitch (H. E. I. 2073, 2074). (3.) The Bible never bids you judge of your religious state by your own feelings. You are there told that you are to walk, not by sight, but by faith; and if by faith, not by feelings. The promises are not made to feeling, but to faith. St. Paul did not say to the jailer who asked what he must do to be saved, "*Feel* that you have Christ in your heart, and you shall be saved;" but, "*Believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ," &c. Are you humbly believing in Jesus Christ as your only Saviour? Are you living in dependence on the Divine promises, and in a faithful use of the means of grace? Are you doing the duties of your station in depen-

dence on God, and with a desire to please, serve, and honour Him? Are you walking in Christian holiness? Then the comforts of Christianity belong to you. Receive them in faith. Be not discouraged because you cannot find in yourself this or that feeling. Rejoice in the *Lord;* believe His promises, because they are His. Abraham against hope believed in hope. He had nothing but the bare word of the Almighty on which he could confide. But what other ground of confidence could he desire? You have the same word; confide in *that.* "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." *You* believe on Him, therefore *you* have everlasting life. What you may *feel* is nothing to the purpose. Your salvation is grounded, not on the changeable feelings of a frail and mutable creature, but on the faithfulness of Him who cannot lie (H. E. I. 2064–2067).—*Edward Cooper: Practical and Familiar Sermons,* vol. vii. 345–362.

THE CURE FOR ANXIETY.

xl. 1, 2. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God, &c.*

The skill of a physician is shown—1. In detecting the disease under which his patient suffers; and, 2. In choosing the best remedy.

There is as great variety in the diseases of the soul as in those of the body: there is the moral palsy, fever, consumption, answering in their symptoms to the corporeal maladies similarly designated; and some souls require quite a different regimen from all others.

I. A PREVALENT SICKNESS.

1. This is pointed out in the words, "Cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished," &c. The condition of Jerusalem is one of distress, anxiety, and distraction; and this so well accords with a passage in the Psalms that it may be connected with it: "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul." The disease is here more clearly described — a "multitude of thoughts." An old translation has it, "In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, Thy comforts have refreshed my soul;" and Bishop Austin's version is, "In the multitude of my anxieties within me;" whilst the representation in the original Hebrew would seem that of a man involved in a labyrinth from whose intricacies there was no way of escape. All this agrees precisely with the case of Jerusalem in the text; and what cause of distressing anxiety would there be whilst there was warfare unfinished and sin unforgiven! The case of sickness, then, so emphatically prescribed for, is that under which the righteous may be labouring from the difficulties which encompass him.

2. Who labour most under this disease? The persons supposed are they who strive to walk according to the precepts of religion. A man may be "a man after God's own heart," and yet subject to the invasion of a crowd of anxieties; and it is never a part of our business to lessen the extent of what is blameworthy, nor to endeavour to persuade the righteous that freedom from anxiety is not a privilege to be sought after. The Christian may rise superior to all intruders, and prove that they do but heighten the blessedness of the blessing (H. E. I. 2053, 4054–4056).

II. IS THE PRESCRIPTION SUFFICIENT? The disease incapacitates for any process of argument; it were of little use to prescribe dark sayings, mysterious dogmas, as though God, in His dealings with His distracted people, did but prescribe the application of "things hard to be understood." With David, recourse was now had to the mysteries of God, but only to His comfort—and with these the Psalmist found that he could delight his soul. Of what does this comfort consist? Of the rich assurances of His forgiving and accepting love; of

the gracious declarations of His everlasting purpose to preserve to the end those chosen in Christ; the multiplied promises of spiritual guidance, protection, victory; the foretastes of immortality; the glimpses of things "within the veil." It is the part of a righteous man, in his season of anxiety and distraction, to confine himself to those comforts, regarding them as a sick man does the medicines given him, as the cordial specially adapted to his state.

Observe that the comforting message is to be delivered to Jerusalem, and that annexed is a statement of "her warfare" being "accomplished." Connect with the exclamation of Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course." It is no far-fetched application of the text to affirm it as specially appropriate on the approach of the last enemy—death. It is here that the power of all mere human resources must eventually fail; for when a man thinks on what it is to die; when he reflects that *die he must, so inevitable is the doom; and yet, that die he cannot, so certain is his immortality,*—in vain does the world offer its richest possessions, or philosophy its conclusions. It can only be what emanates from another world, what comes with authority from another world, that can have a solacing power, when it is the loosening of our connection with this world which causes the confused tumult in the soul; and Christianity furnishes an abundance of what is needed for allaying the fear of death and soothing man's passage to the tomb.

The anxious believer has then only to give himself meekly over into the Good Shepherd's hands. Let him not argue, let him not debate, let him not sit in judgment; let him simply have recourse to the comforts of God. "None," says Christ, "can pluck them out of my hands." Christ holds His sheep; it is not the sheep that hold Christ, and God has caused it to be said of him, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my servant, and tell him that his warfare is accomplished."—*Henry Melvill, B.D.: Golden Lectures*, 1851, pp. 737–744.

The Divine Glory Revealed in Christ.

(*Preached on Christmas Day.*)

xl. 3–5. *The voice of Him that crieth in the wilderness, &c.* (α)

I take the text to be prophecy, in the first and lowest sense, of the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon; then of the appearance of Christ in the flesh; of the manifestation, also, of Christ in the believer's soul; and of the manner in which He will set up His spiritual kingdom in the world (β).

I. Its literal accomplishment. This prophecy was literally accomplished,—1. *In the appearance of John the Baptist.* 2. *Following the footsteps of the servant comes the Master.* Here the glory of God was manifested, and all flesh living at that time in Judea saw it together. Jesus Christ was the visible image of the power, the truth, the holiness of God.

II. Its spiritual accomplishment. This is seen in the work of God in the human soul. In this there is both preparation and manifestation. For Christ no more bursts upon the soul at once than He did upon the world; He sends His messenger to prepare the way before Him. That preparing herald, figured by John the Baptist, is repentance. Consider what repentance is, and you will see how it prepares the soul for Christ, for pardon, happiness, and purity. 1. The first element in repentance is *a deep and serious conviction of the fact of our sin.* 2. The second is *a conviction of the extreme danger of sin and its infinite desert.* 3. The third is a *burdened and disquieted spirit.* When these convictions and feelings have been produced in the soul, it is prepared

for the coming of Christ into it. And when He comes into it, in its deliverance from the guilt, misery, and dominion of sin there is a glorious manifestation of the mercy and power of God.

III. ITS ALLEGORICAL ACCOMPLISHMENT. It is seen in the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth. He sends forth His heralds, and by them the world is being prepared for that fuller manifestation of God which will constitute the latter-day glory.—*Richard Watson: Works*, vol. iv. pp. 307–318.

(α) Many have admired this prophecy as an ancient poem who have not arrived at the proper interpretation. The poet seizes on one point in the national theology—the coming of a great Deliverer. In his imagination he gives him the character of a conqueror, coming to save and deliver. He represents him as marching along in Eastern pomp, issuing messengers before him to prepare the way; sending out pioneers to raise the valleys, to level the mountains, to make "the crooked places straight, and the rough places plain." And some have seen no more than this in it; they have lost all the character of the prophecy in their admiration of the poem. We are to remember that the prophetic dispensation was a Divine dispensation, and that the prophets were holy men of God. There is the richest poetry, yet there is no mere adornment: that is, there is nothing designed only to please the imagination; but with every circumstance of figure and ornament some new revelation is communicated, or some old revelation placed in a new aspect, and shown with fresh vigour. Hence, therefore, in the interpretation of this text, we are really to expect a person crying, a voice preparing the way; we are really to expect the removing of difficulties, similar to the levelling of mountains, the raising of valleys, &c.; and we are really to expect, not merely some great deliverer indefinitely, but such a Deliverer, such a Saviour, as shall answer the description given of him in the text, "The glory of the Lord."—*Watson.*

(β) We cannot understand the Scriptures aright unless we know that God has established an instructive set of types, making one thing the figure of another. All Nature is full of types of the most blessed things; and happy is the man who can read the book of Nature in the light of the Lord. Everything around him shall give him instruction. But one event is often made the type of another. The deliverance of the children of Israel was a type of the deliverance of the people of God. Their journey through the wilderness, their supplies, their deliverances, their entrance into Canaan, are a type of the true Joshua bringing His "many sons to glory." The Babylonish captivity is a type of the present state of the Jews; and their restoration, probably alluded to in the text, is the best type of their being brought again into the Church; and the whole together is a type of the deliverance which God works out for His people and for the whole Church. The language, too, which is suited to these outward events is often employed by the Spirit to denote other events. For instance, the language which refers to the deliverance of His people out of the Babylonish captivity, and their restoration to their own land, is employed to set forth His plan of working in the hearts of men and in the world at large.

These things must be remembered in reference to prophecy. What appears to be human skill is absolutely heavenly wisdom. It must not be interpreted by the common canons of criticism, or we shall lose all its force, and beauty, and meaning.—*Watson.*

PREPARING FOR THE COMING OF THE KING.

(*For Advent Sunday.*)

xl. 3–5. *The voice of him that crieth, &c.*

The Spirit of Christ, which spake by the prophets, thus describes the preparatory work assigned to the heralds and forerunners of His advent. The application to John the Baptist is made by all the Evangelists, by John himself, and is confirmed by our Lord. One great point is thereby determined,—the whole passage has a spiritual meaning. It is, in fact, a parable or sacred allegory, by which alone we can be prepared to behold the glory of God revealed in the person of the Son. The "wilderness" represents the whole race of mankind alienated from God and abandoned to the impulses of a corrupt nature. Just so far as men are influenced by worldly principles the call is addressed to them. His way has yet to be prepared in their hearts. This saying applies in the full sense to the unconverted, but in a very true and practical sense it reaches all.

1. In order that the highway shall be made straight, the first injunction is that every valley shall be exalted. In mountainous districts many a deep ravine is found, scarcely visited by the sun's light, filled with noxious vapours, producing scanty and unwholesome food for its squalid inhabitants. How many dark places of our common humanity may be described in these very terms! Man bridges the chasms, and makes a way by which he passes triumphantly to the accomplishment of his objects; but as for the places themselves, he leaves them for the most part unchanged, or, if changed, but sadder and darker than before, the rushing sounds which tell of his onward progress being no solace to the startled mind of the dweller in the gloomy hollow. Far different is God's way; not thus does He bid us prepare our brethren's hearts, our own hearts, for His coming. He wills that the valley itself shall be exalted—the ignorant raised into the clear light of heaven, the gloomy and despondent spirit raised out of its state of hopeless foreboding and brooding sorrow.

2. "Every mountain and hill shall be made low." Self-exaltation is the surest hindrance to the favour of the great King.

3. "The crooked shall be made straight." Crookedness, dishonesty, the absence of candour, of sincerity, of straightforwardness, is a hateful thing and must be put away. In our temporal and spiritual things alike there must be an integrity that will bear the scrutiny of our Lord (H. E. I. 3000, 3010). When He finds a heart open to receive Him, an humble spirit, and guileless simplicity, He will never withhold the full disclosure of His love.

4. "And the rough places plain." Such rough places were ever common in the East—rugged passes beset by dense thickets, lairs of wild beasts, intricate fastnesses, in which robbers find covert, which obstruct the progress of the sovereign into the remote parts of his dominions. In this we recognise a lively image of the evil passions, the corrupt affections, the unregulated desires which overrun the unregenerate heart, and which are extirpated slowly, with much effort, and very imperfectly from the heart when regenerate. We cannot say that the Saviour will not come to us, nor even that He will not dwell with us, until those hindrances are cleared away. That assertion would paralyse all hope; it is both contrary to experience and to plain texts of Holy Writ. But this we must say, He will not abide in us if things so evil are indulged and tolerated. The rough places *must* be made plain, at whatever cost; for until that work is accomplished, we cannot know the deep peace of the redeemed and sanctified child of grace (H. E. I. 1466–1468).

The work of preparation must be done. Are we dismayed at its extent? Then remember that it is a work of grace. What is low in us must be exalted by the action of grace upon our consenting hearts; what is haughty must be thus abased, the crooked be made straight, and the rough be made plain (H. E. I. 1071, 2376).—*F. C. Cook, M.A.: Sermons Preached in Lincoln's Inn Chapel*, pp. 279–291.

The charge to "prepare the way of the Lord" implies that there are obstacles in the way.

His way is to be made through the desert and the wilderness, *i.e.*, where hitherto there was no way. The reference may be, first, to the state of the Jewish Church in the time of John; but the words contain a true and clear description of the Gentile nations. And what is applied generally to the nations is equally applicable to every human heart:—

1. There is the pride and self-righteousness of man. The thoughts of men rise like mountains to impede the truth. At the very time when man is diseased and dying, he imagines himself whole, and without need of a physician.

2. The heart is by nature hard,

impenitent, blinded to its own defects, and, even after confession of them, unwilling to have them condemned or to give them up. Men hear the righteous law denouncing them, but go on to break it; they can stand unmoved before the cross of Jesus and trample upon His blood (H. E. I. 2669–2279).

3. The state of human desires and affections presents other and formidable obstacles to the claims of the Lord. Their desires are low, their affections carnal (Luke xiv. 18–20).

4. In some there exists a mass of prejudice, and the truth of Christ is viewed under a false light, or through a perverting medium. They will not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, and they cannot enter therein. Some are prejudiced against the authority of revelation,—some against the doctrine of grace, or salvation by the merit of another; and many dislike the holiness, the self-denial, the separation from the world which Christianity inculcates.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Repentance* is necessary to prepare the way,—*humility*, to receive and learn the doctrine,—*prayer*, to give it success in the heart,—and *watchfulness*, to carry it out into practice. 2. Every Christian has something to do in preparing the way of Christ in the earth. — *George Redford, D.D., LL.D.: Weekly Christian Teacher*, vol. ii. pp. 105–108.

This chapter opens the great evangelic poem, the work of Isaiah's last years. It is among the most conspicuous of the heralds of the Advent. It contains three distinctly marked features which indicate definite stages of preparation for it. 1. It marks the period of Jewish history in which the temporal power and splendour of Judaism began visibly to wane. The mission of Judah as a kingdom was accomplished. But something in it did not wither. Faded and fallen as a nation, the Jews became at once more powerful than ever as a Church. 2. A very marked prophecy of a universal Church. The first promise (Gen. xii. 1–3) was hidden for ages. Here it does not flash,—it shines, the calling of the Gentiles being the great burden of it (xlix. 5–6, 22, 23, ix. 1–6). The words were spoken on which the King, when He came, could rest His appeal (Luke iv. 18, 19). 3. There was a clear vision set before the Jews of a great Sufferer for man who should yet be a great Conqueror. From the day when Isaiah wrote, the *form* of the Messiah was set clearly before mankind.

How far did this preparation fall in with larger movements which made the world ready for the actual Advent?

How the heralds prepared the way of the Lord.

I. THE JEWISH THEOCRACY. Some suppose Christ to have grown out of His age. But Christ and Christianity cannot be accounted for by natural evolution, with the Jewish theocracy standing in the way. Gen. xii. 1–3 struck a keynote which runs through Jewish history.

II. THE JEWISH DISPERSION. The witnesses charged with the promise and the prophecy were scattered through the civilised world. Up to the captivity the Jews kept themselves sternly and sullenly isolated (Acts x. 28); afterwards they dispersed with facility. The significance of this is to be found in estimating the confusion of religious beliefs among mankind; and especially that neither Oriental nor Western thought became victorious. Jewish communities, with a firm belief in revelation, sacred books containing credible history, and a definite system of Divine legislation, the purity, righteousness, and charity of which were self-evident, settled among them.

III. THE INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL PROGRESS OF THE AGES PRECEDING THE ADVENT IN THE DIRECTION OF CHRISTIANITY. There was progress between Socrates and Seneca; from the citizen of a state, almost domestic in its character, man became the subject of a great empire, and developed individuality and responsibility. Alexander led the Greek into a world too

big for him; he became oppressed, distracted, and broke away from his traditions in a world of ceaseless conflict and change. Between Alexander's conquests and Roman supremacy the thinker was thrown back upon himself, and compelled to ask ultimate questions: What am I? Whence came I? &c. There was *a tendency towards* the Christian question of salvation. But there was *no response* to the question forcing itself forward, What must I do to be saved? All was waiting for the proclamation (ch. lxi. 1).

IV. THE ROMAN EMPIRE. This was by far the most important secular herald of the Advent (Luke ii. 1). 1. Modern European society is but the fully-developed Empire of Rome. 2. Amid a universal peace, and with a universal language, preachers could go almost everywhere. 3. The fundamental question opened by the Roman Empire is also that of Christianity—*the relation of men to each other. Is it enmity or brotherhood?* (1.) Political amity gave rise to the idea of human brotherhood. (2.) Still men were at sea about the reality, grounds, and claims of this brotherhood. (3.) Thus the way was prepared till the time came when there were "shepherds abiding in the field," &c. (Luke ii. 8–14). Thus the Lord entered into this world and took possession of His throne.—*J. Baldwin Brown: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xiii. p. 40.

THE MORAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

xl. 3–5. *The voice of Him that crieth, &c.*

We are authorised by the four Evangelists to understand these verses as a prophecy of the ministry of John the Baptist, who appeared as the forerunner of the Messiah; and they may be properly applied to all missionaries and religious workers who go out to uncivilised, heathen, and superstitious countries, to prepare the inhabitants for the reception of pure Christianity. The language is figurative, and is borrowed from an ancient Eastern custom. When monarchs went out to visit distant parts of their dominions or to invade neighbouring kingdoms, they sent heralds or pioneers before them to clear the way and remove obstructions. In allusion to this custom, John the Baptist and all his successors in similar work are represented as going out before the Messiah to clear away obstructions and prepare the way for the establishment of His kingdom in the world. Let us notice—

I. THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD IN ITS SINFUL AND UNREFORMED STATE.

It is here represented as a wild, pathless, and dreary wilderness. This figurative description suggests — 1. *That it is unproductive of anything good.* The earth when left uncultivated will produce nothing valuable and useful; and so men in their sinful state will bear no fruit to the glory of God and the good of their fellow-creatures. 2. *That it is productive of things worthless, noxious, and injurious.* A wilderness produces briars, thorns, and worthless weeds, and forms hiding-places for ravenous beasts and poisonous reptiles. This is a proper description of the heathen and uncivilised world. Men there rob, deceive, and devour each other. "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

II. THE NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT PREPARATION FOR ITS MORAL TRANSFORMATION.

1. *Religious teachers must be employed to combat with the ignorance and thick darkness which cover the people.* To preach the Gospel to people without any kind of elementary education would be like throwing grain-seed among thorns or over hard rocks uncovered with any soil. This preparatory work is carried on most effectively in the present day. Eleven Protestant missionaries and assistants are now employed on

the wide field of the heathen and superstitious world for every one so employed fifty years ago.

2. *The Word of God must be made accessible to the n tions in their respective languages and dialects.* Eighty years ago the Bible had not been translated into more than forty of the languages of the world; now the whole book, or portions of it, is translated into more than two hundred and fifty languages. We thus see that the Christian Church has done six times more to prepare the way of the Lord in the last eighty years than it had done in the previous eighteen hundred years.

3. *The international communications which are rapidly opening in every direction are promoted by men of the world simply for mercantile and scientific purposes, but they are evidently overruled by Divine Providence to prepare the way of the Lord.* Many are running to and fro, and knowledge is increasing. Pure Christianity will ultimately reap all the advantages of this, for every form of false religion can only thrive in the darkness of ignorance and thoughtlessness.

III. THE GLORIOUS TRANSFORMATION WHICH SHALL BE EFFECTED.

"Every valley shall be exalted," &c., *i.e.*, all the malarious morasses of immorality shall be drained and converted into healthy and productive land; all high hills and barren mountains of false systems of religion shall be levelled down and disappear; and all crooked and uneven dealings in the diplomacies of nations and commercial transactions shall be straightened and made conformable to the golden rule of the Gospel (Matt. vii. 12). When this blessed change is realised, "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed"—

1. *In the number of converts to the true religion.* The true followers of Christ in every age hitherto have been only a "little flock" in comparison with all the inhabitants of the world, but the time is coming "when they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord."

2. *In the beauty of their holy and consistent characters.* "Holiness unto the Lord" shall be stamped upon every person and thing then; "and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts." The good works of God's people will so shine before men that they shall be led to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

3. *In the temporal and spiritual happiness of the world.* All the sources of misery and unhappiness shall be dried up entirely. Wars and bloody contentions between nations shall cease unto the ends of the earth. All tyranny, oppression, and every form of injustice shall be removed, and kindness, charity, and justice will occupy their place. Men who used to be likened to bears, wolves, lions, leopards, and poisonous serpents, shall be changed and become tame and as harmless as the lamb, the kid, and the weaned child (chap. xi. 6–8). The whole earth will become the holy mountain of the Lord. The spiritual condition of the Church will then be indescribably happy and glorious. There will be no lifeless religious service, and no worshipper groaning and downcast under the hidings of the Lord's face, for "the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud of smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence."

IV. THE CERTAINTY OF THE REALISATION OF THIS TRANSFORMATION.

"For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." 1. *The Lord has ample power to fulfil all His promises.* The opponents and obstructors of the promised transformation are described in the next three verses as grass and withering flowers. And what is grass to withstand Almighty power?

2. *The Lord is omniscient, and no unforeseen contingencies can derange His plans, as it is often with us* (chap. xlvi. 9).

3. *The Lord is the God of truth, and*

it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of His law and promises to fail (Numb. xxiii. 19).—*Thomas Rees, D.D.*

The Levelling Force of Christianity.

xl. 4. *Every valley shall be exalted, &c.*

The primary reference of these words is to the clearing of the way for the captive Jews in Babylon to return to their own land. Between Babylon and Jerusalem there was an immense tract of country, which was an untrodden and mountainous desert. The prophet hears in vision the voice of a herald demanding that a highway should be made, that the valleys be filled up, the mountains levelled, and the crooked way made straight. The Evangelists give the passage another and a moral application. They regard John the Baptist as the herald who in his wakening ministry prepared the way in men's hearts for the mission of Him who was the spiritual Deliverer of mankind.

The words illustrate *the socially levelling force of Christianity.* There are and ever have been in the soul of society opinions, prejudices, feelings, conventional notions, which, like mountains and valleys, have separated men into classes, and prevented the free and loving interchange of soul. How does Christianity remove those mountains, fill up the valleys, and give a straight pathway into souls?

In two ways:—

I. By the levelling truths which it reveals. 1. *A common God.* A plurality of deities divides heathen society into sections. Christianity reveals one God, the Father of all, by whom are all things, and to whom are all things. It denounces all other deities as vanities and lies. A common God wakens a community of love, purpose, and worship.

2. *A common nature.* In heathen mythology men are represented as the offspring of different deities. In India one caste claims a nobler origin than another; and even in Christendom there are those who impiously claim a higher blood (Acts xvii. 26).

3. *A common obligation.* Different codes of duty divide men. The Gospel reveals one law for all—to love the one God with all our hearts, and our neighbours as ourselves.

4. *A common depravity.* Pharisaic sentiment divides (Rom. iii. 23; Isa. liii. 6).

5. *A common salvation.* All are diseased, and there is but one Physician. All are captives, and there is but one Deliverer. All are lost, and there is but one Saviour.

II. By the levelling spirit which it generates. It generates a spirit which raises a man above the prejudices of heart and conventionalities that divide men. It is a spirit which has supreme regard to three things—1. *The spiritual in man.* The true Christian spirit sees no dignity where there is meanness of soul, no degradation where there is a true nobility of heart. 2. *The right in conduct.* The true spirit judges not by custom and policy, but by principles of everlasting right; and it inspires a man to attempt the removal of all social mountains and hills that stand in the way of the right. 3. *The eternal in destiny.* The human race is regarded not in its merely visible and temporal relation, but in its unseen and eternal.

Its levelling, however, does not involve spoliation. Distinctions arising from varieties in intellectual power, mental tastes, physical capacity, and individual circumstances, it recognises and respects. These do not necessarily involve social separations. Rightly used they are a blessed media of intercourse. It is the mountains arising from individual vanity, religious bigotry, national pride, worldly pretensions, and spiritual ignorance that Christianity levels to the dust.—*David Thomas, D.D.: Homilist*, Third Series, vol. viii. p. 95.

The Universal Revelation of the Glory of the Lord.

xl. 5. *And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, &c.*

The chapter of which the text is a part forms the commencement of a series of addresses, distinguished not only for their elegance and sublimity, but for the manner in which they point to a future and far-distant period, when a display should be given of Divine splendour infinitely superior to any previously exhibited in our world. The institutions of the kingdom and Church of Judea, even in the days of Isaiah, were glory itself as compared with those of the nations around, and yet even their glory was as darkness when compared with those to which these predictions pointed as constituting the New Testament Church, and what has been emphatically characterised as "the glory of the latter days." The former was but the dawn of a lengthened day; the latter was to be the brightness of meridian splendour; the former illumined a very limited sphere, the latter was to irradiate every part of the world, and to send its brilliancy through the universe.

I. **The glory to be revealed**—"the glory of the Lord." The word *glory* is a figurative expression, signifying lustre, effulgence, splendour, magnificence. The glory of the Lord means the bright shining forth of the consummate excellences, or perfections of His nature. Never was such an exhibition given of that glory as in the mission and mediation of the Son of God for the redemption of sinful men. It is to this that the declaration in the text unquestionably refers (cf. vers. 3, 4; John i. 28; Matt. iii. 3). No event had ever given such a demonstrative display of the glory of the Lord as this (Luke ii. 13, 14). That the redemption of a ruined world was the object of the Messiah's mission is undoubted (Gal. iv. 4, 5); in this the glory of the Lord appeared (ch. xliv. 23). He displays His glory in all His works (Ps. xix. 1, 2; Rom. i. 20); but the brightest display of that glory by far is given, and is to be seen in the face of Jesus Christ. Note particularly that the glory of every Divine perfection was manifested in the mission and work of Christ. 1. *Wisdom* (1 Tim. iii. 16; 1 Cor. ii. 7; Col. i. 26, 27; Eph. i. 8, iii. 10). 2. *Power* (1 Cor. i. 24); all the resources of earth and hell were laid under requisition to hinder the execution of His undertaking (ch. lxiii. 1–6; Col. ii. 15). 3. *Holiness* and *justice* (ch. liii. 5, 10–12; Ps. xxii. 1–3). How the glory of Divine grace now triumphed! Though the "Holy One," He yet provided for the happiness of sinners; He showed Himself to be at once "the just God and the Saviour" (Rom. iii. 23–26; Eph. ii. 4–8). Like Him who accomplished it, redemption was not only "full of grace," it was also "full of truth;" through Him all the promises of God were made "yea and amen to the glory of God by us;" the significance of the ancient sacrifices and ceremonies was disclosed; feeble glimmerings of light were swallowed up by a full blaze of glory (Mic. vii. 20; John i. 29).

The glory of the Lord was further demonstrated in the manner in which His various attributes were thus made to harmonise. There was no clashing; while the honour of each was advanced, the whole were glorified together (Ps. lxxxv. 10, 11).

II. **The means that were to be employed in revealing this glory of the Lord.**

1. *The personal ministry of our Lord Himself* (Heb. i. 1–3). The manner in which Christ proved the truth of His mission and doctrines emphatically declared His glory (John iii. 2; Luke xxiv. 19); and all this was substantiated by His sufferings and death, His resurrection and ascension (Phil. ii. 8–11).

2. The *written Word* of Christ (John v. 39; Col. iii. 16; 2 Tim. iii. 15). All, therefore, who wish the glory of the Lord to be more and more revealed shall strive and "pray that the Word

of the Lord may have free course and be glorified."

3. The *preaching of the Gospel* (Mark xvi. 15, 16, 20). Whenever the preaching of evangelical truth is rightly conducted, the glory of the Lord will be more and more revealed (1 Cor. i. 18–24); but the members of the Church generally are to be instrumental by their prayers, instructions, and example (Matt. vi. 10, Isa. ii. 5; Matt. v. 16; Phil. i. 9–11).

III. The extent to which the glory of the Lord shall be exhibited—"All flesh shall see it together." When Isaiah spoke thus, the very existence of Jehovah was unknown to every nation under heaven but one. Innumerable multitudes are yet sitting in darkness. This great promise has still, therefore, to receive its full accomplishment (ch. xii. 3; Matt. ix. 37, 38; Rom. x. 13, 15); then shall come to pass the saying that is written (Hab. ii. 14; Isa. xxxv. 1, 2).

IV. The great purpose for which the exhibition of the Divine glory is to be made. What this must be is clearly implied, though, in our version at least, not expressed. It is, that the Lord may so be made known as to be universally and exclusively honoured and obeyed (ch. ii. 11). And the next grand object in view is, to promote the best interests of men (ch. xlv. 22; lii. 10).

V. The certainty of the whole, as intimated by the assertion—"For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Heb. x. 23, xi. 11; 1 Sam. xv. 29). What the mouth of the Lord hath spoken, the power of the Lord will accomplish (Jer. xxxii. 27).

APPLICATION. — 1. Let us rejoice that our God is the God of glory, and in this character the God of salvation. 2. Let us individually seek to have saving manifestations of His glory (Exod. xxx. iii. 18). 3. Let us recognise our infinite obligations for the means we enjoy for this purpose. 4. Let us seek to advance His glory far and wide (ch. lxii. 1).—*Adam Thomson, D.D.: Outlines*, pp. 108–114.

We believe that Jesus Christ was that image of God whom prophets had been desiring to behold. Is that enough for us? Are we content that the world should go on as it is,—the Christian world, or the world that is not Christian?

If not, what is it we wish for? Is Jesus the One that shall come, or do we look for another?

There is a disposition among religious men to look for something else than the manifestation of Christ. Christ is, according to them, a means to an end, but not the end; the sight of Him is not itself what they covet; the loss of Him is not itself what they dread. Again, there are not a few who say that the Gospel has failed of its object. Has it set the world right? Has misery ceased? Has wrong ceased? Has the reign of peace begun? The last of these opinions ought not to be rejected till men have cleared their minds of the first.

I. In the Old Testament the misery of the Jewish people, though produced by the most different instruments, has but one cause. Whoever are the tyrants —Pharaoh, Jabin, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar—*tyranny* is the cause of their groaning. *A Deliverer* is their one infinite necessity. Men appear as their deliverers; but they appear in the name of the Lord. *Idolatry* is the worship of some tyrant force. These thoughts and experiences were the school of the prophets. Through the prevalence of idolatry in the world, they were forced to rely upon the might of God and to expect the revelation of His glory. God cannot be disappointed. His purpose is to reveal Himself, and He will reveal Himself.

II. Isaiah is rightly called "The Evangelical Prophet," because he saw more clearly than any one that only One who perfectly revealed God, who perfectly revealed Him as a Deliverer, could be the Person whom Israelites and all nations desired. Every event was a partial Epiphany. He hungered for one which should be for "all flesh." The mouth of the Lord had as much spoken this as He had spoken the com-

mands against adultery, or murder, or false witness.

III. Apostles, while they claimed the words of this prophet as pointing to Christ, forbade a contentment with what disciples had heard, or seen, or felt, or believed. They said, "We are saved by hope" (Rom. xi. 33; Eph. iii. 18, 19).

IV. Of such teaching the consequence must be, that whatever calamities come upon the world will be stimulants and encouragements to this hope. There will be no shame in indulging it; because it is a hope for the world and not only for ourselves. There will be no uncertainty about it; because it does not depend upon our faith or virtue, but upon the eternal Word of God. The mouth of the Lord had spoken it.

LESSONS.—1. Let us have no doubt that, however we may classify men's oppressions, as individual or social, as political or intellectual, as animal or spiritual, God Himself has awakened the cry for freedom. 2. Let us have no doubt that that cry is, when truly understood and interpreted, a cry that God will appear as the Deliverer, that His glory may be revealed. 3. Let us therefore be most eager to meet all these cries, however discordant they be, with a true sympathy and recognition. 4. Let us, without precipitation—rather by acts than by words—show that we believe we can give God's answer to them.

It is an old commonplace of divinity which we are strangely forgetting, that despair is the only utter perdition, because despair binds a man in the prison of his evil nature, and fastens the chain of the evil spirit upon him; because all hope points upwards to God, and is the response of our spirit to His Spirit. The promise of this final Epiphany stands not on the decrees of lawgivers, or the expectations of holy men, or the confidence of seers. It comes from Him who said, "Let there be light, and there was light."—*F. D. Maurice: Lincoln's Inn Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 175–289.

THE TRANSIENT AND THE PERMANENT.

(*Autumn Sermons.*)

xl. 6–8. *All flesh is grass, &c.* (*a*)

We are witnessing one of the last phases of that wonderful life which Nature unfolds before us each year with ever-new beauty. To most men it is a sad phase. Why? Not because we are entering upon the rugged season of the year. They know that the discomforts of winter are transient; and winter brings its own pleasures. The feeling finds its source in that intuitive faculty in man which enables him to interpret the spiritual significance in Nature, and which tells him that in the withering and falling leaf, decomposing and resolving itself into its first elements,—in the dry and flowerless stalk and the harsh brown grass, he sees the type of his own mortality (P. D. 248, 2222).

The decay of autumn suggesting the thought of decay in human life, suggests also very forcibly the thought of immortality. Never does the longing to live for ever so take possession of my soul as when all about me is telling me that life is transitory. When life is fullest and most satisfying, death is most unwelcome; and when decay and death draw nigh, we long with quickened desire for life.

There are two elements in all things earthly—the transitory and the permanent. Nature has a real life which survives when she sheds what have been the visible tokens of her life. The things which seem most alive in Nature are the leaves, the flowers, and the fruits; but these are the things that perish soonest. The real life lies deeper—hidden from human eyes; and that endures. It is so with man. There is somewhat that is real and

abiding; there is somewhat that is only temporary—the foliage in which the real expresses itself to-day, and which it will cast aside to-morrow. And so we find the sacred poet thinking upon the transitoriness of life, reassuring himself with the thought that there is nevertheless somewhat that is real and abiding. "All flesh is grass," &c.

There are lives which all of us can live which will have more than a transitory significance; deeds within the power of us all which will be immortal; things which may be acquired by us which neither time nor accident can wrest from us.

I. Our good deeds will live for ever. Our acts of kindness, generosity, helpfulness are immortal because they are Divine. There is a threefold immortality—1. Acts that lessen life's burdensomeness and diminish the temptations to sin have far-reaching consequences to others. By these personal ministries, often humble and obscure, we are shaping immortal lives. Our good deeds will live in other souls (P. D. 1006, 2302, 2443, 3205). 2. You cannot do another good without doing yourself good in the deed; you are building your own character, and that will show your work upon it unto eternity (H. E. I. 720; P. D. 3609). 3. Our good deeds become immortal by their life in the thought of God (Heb. vi. 10; Acts x. 31; H. E. I. 451, 1726; P. D. 2012).

II. Our pure affections will live for ever (P. D. 749–2351).

The leaves fall and mingle with the sod, the flower droops and withers, and earth ere long will lie sepulchred beneath the snow; but in the providence of God the spring will come, and earth will wake to a fresh and radiant life. And so, also, when our earthly plans are broken, our accumulations scattered, and our bodies crumble into dust, the soul with all its fulness of love and all its trophies of service shall live on in the immortality of God.—*George P. Gilman.*

(α) The very affecting images of Scripture which compare the short-lived existence of man to the decay of the vegetable creation are scarcely understood in this country. The verdure is perpetual in England. It is difficult to discover a time when it can be said, "The grass withereth." But let a traveller visit the beautiful plain of Smyrna, or any other part of the East, in the month of May, and revisit it toward the end of June, and he will perceive the force and beauty of these allusions. In May, an appearance of fresh verdure and of rich luxuriance everywhere meets the eye; the face of Nature is adorned with a carpet of flowers and herbage of the most elegant kind. But a month or six weeks subsequently, how changed is the entire scene! The beauty is gone, the grass is withered, the flower is faded; a brown and dusty desert has taken the place of a delicious garden. It is, doubtless, to this rapid transformation of Nature that the Scriptures compare the fate of man. —*Hartley: Researches in Greece*, p. 237.

God's comparisons are striking, His contrasts sharp. Could the perishability of creation and the imperishability of its uncreated Author be put more vividly before our eyes than by likening the one to a worn-out garment, ready to drop apart, while the other stands out untouched by time, and with years that have no end? (Ps. cii. 26, 27). In this passage from ancient prophecy, how the fleeting is made a background on which to set the fixed! Over against Nature's decaying growth are put Revelation's verities that eternally abide. "The grass withereth," &c.

I. We have symbolised **a changing world.** While the decay of vegetation which the season brings needs not be, and ought not to be, a ghastly or gloomy thing (β), it is a symbol of change, a reminder of the evanescence of all material objects and concerns. Look around, and you will observe that all things are changing, most of them rapidly (H. E. I. 4975–4989; P. D. 408, 2536, 3336). Turn where you will, you note the restlessness of men. New partners, new parties, new experiments, new diversions. Why are all things around us thus full of change? 1. Partly because that capricious thing the human will underlies all finite activities, and will not let us remain quiet. Its fickleness it is that keeps public and private life disturbed (γ). A changing world! Can it be

otherwise with such a vacillating element under it? Can you build a vessel that will not pitch or lurch, when beneath it there is that which pitches and lurches all the while? A changing world indeed. Changing in its loves and hates, in its wishes and its wills, in its hopes and fears, in its purposes and plans. Changing like withering grass and fading flower. 2. But this evanescence is not entirely an outgrowth of human weakness; part of it is the outworking of a Divine design. The fluctuations of earth are its heavenly discipline. God uses it to rid the world of evils, as He uses thunders and lightnings to shake out of the air deadly diseases hanging there. Even for the individual a quiet, undisturbed life is rarely God's plan. The soul is apt to grow hard, and selfish, and narrow, unless overturnings and ups and downs shake it loose from earthly good and gain (Ps. lv. 19; Jer. xlviii. 11; H. E. I. 3997–4014). To prevent this, changes keep us shaken up. God's merciful hand is in the commotion (H. E. I. 110, 111).

II. Note now the stability with which this inconstancy is contrasted. Turn from the changing world and consider the unchanging Word. "The Word of our God standeth for ever" (Matt. xxiv. 35; 1 Pet. i. 24, 25). 1. There is this immutability about the *facts* which Scripture states. Every little while infidelity with blare of trumpets announces some fresh discovery of science hostile to revelation, and at each disclosure some timid believers are almost ready to concede that the Bible has gotten its deathblow. Children that we are to be scared by shadows! Why, Sir Charles Lyell tells us that in 1806 the French Institute numbered more than eighty geological theories that struck against the inspired record, and not one of those theories survives to-day (H. E. I. 539, 636, 642–645). 2. There is the same permanence about the *predictions* of this Word (δ). 3. There is the same perpetuity about the *principles* or *doctrines* of this Word. At times the enemy comes in so like a flood that it seems as if all the old landmarks were swept away. But the old verities remain unchanged. Divine holiness, justice, and supreme dominion; human accountability to a righteous law; human sinfulness, and pardon through a crucified Saviour; the necessity of repentance and regeneration through the renewing and sanctifying Spirit; a reckoning day when right shall be crowned and wrong crushed, and the drama of history close amid praises—not one of these Bible truths has been abrogated or annulled by all men's sneers or jeers. Providence is not a myth. Christ is not an amiable enthusiast. Heaven is not a dream, nor is hell a fiction. 4. This Word is permanent in its *fruits*. "The Word of our God" is first of all sometimes heard with the ear, then sometimes accepted by the understanding, then sometimes received into the soul, and then sometimes manifested in the life of the believer. Where so grasped and held, it is a principle of undecaying power. The work that begins with the saving entrance of the Word goes on for ever. Not only does the truth so embraced by the heart perpetually produce fruit in the individual, but in the community it keeps yielding fruit year after year.—*Thomas E. Vassar.*

(β) There is a kind of autumn sermonising or moralising that is more vapoury than truthful, and more sentimental than pious. Much of the doleful talk about the blighting and blasting of the fair and the beautiful, in the field and forest and on the lawn, is foolishness. The blanched leaf fluttering from the tree is spoken of pityingly as though overtaken by some untimely fate, as though some destroying influence had cut short its life. But as a matter of fact, we know that the falling of the leaf was as natural as the unfolding of the leaf. Winter or no winter, frost or no frost, it would have faded or fallen, because that was the Creator's plan concerning it. He meant from the beginning that it should last only so long. Study its structure, and you will see that its work was done. When, therefore, the landscape spreads around the emblems of a frail and dying world, instead of taking on a plaintive tone, it would be wiser cheerfully to say, "The summer has finished its appointed task, and when the set time

comes, may my own be finished just as well! —*Vassar.*

(γ) I was running over again recently the career of that hapless Queen of France, Marie Antoinette. Who that has once read it can forget the tragic history? For a brief space she was the idol of her realm. Then her enthusiastic subjects offered to take the horses from the royal carriage and draw it with their own hands down the streets of her gay capital. How terrible the transition when, a little later, along those same avenues they dragged the widowed sovereign to execution, rending the air with curses that ceased only when the bloody head was held up in sight.—*Vassar.*

(δ) Prophecy is only pre-written history Much of it has not yet come to pass, yet Christian trust no more doubts that what is pledged is coming than the man of the world doubts that winter is on its way. Why should we doubt it? Look back and see how predictions once made have turned into realisations on the right hand and the left. Hear the cry of the bittern as it sails amidst the flooded palaces of Babylon; listen to the song of the fisherman spreading his net where Tyre once sat a proud ocean-queen; catch the wail of the Jew downtrodden in the city of his fathers, and without a country anywhere that he can call his own, and then ask whether other promises or other threatenings of the Divine Word are not as likely to be fulfilled.—*Vassar.*

The Story and Moral of a Blade of Grass.

xl. 6–8. *All flesh is grass, &c.*

I. The story of the blade of grass.

The tender beauty of these words is not confined to the fact that their leading thought—the transitoriness of human life—is full of pathos. There is a plaintive music in them; the refrain —"grass withers, flowers fade"—goes singing through the brain, quickening the tender grace of days that are dead. Imagination stirs and works; we *see* the broad pleasant field bathed in sunlight, and then the fierce hot blast sweep across it. Who does not feel at times that *that* is a true picture of human life? But these words take new force as we connect them with the circumstances in and for which they were spoken. The prophet's main duty hitherto had been to denounce the judgments of God on the sins of Israel. He is now carried on to the distant time when the Jews will start on their return to their native land. He is to "speak comfortably" to them. As he broods over the vision—"Hark, a crier!" Another message of comfort (vers. 3–5). There is once more silence in the prophet's heart. But, "Hark, a voice." It is the Divine Voice saying "Cry!"—*i.e.*, "*Proclaim.*" The herald turns and asks, "What shall I cry?" The Voice replies, "All flesh is grass," &c. The great heathen world was transient.

"Comfortable words" for the Jews. But they must not forget that *their* life on earth is brief; that *they* can only endure as they fashion themselves on the Word of God: "This people" is grass.

II. The moral of the story.

The blade of grass reminds us that human life soon withers, that human fortune often withers even before the man dies. James particularises the general lesson (James i. 10, 11). He also reminds us that some men wither even while they retain the full vigour of life and their good fortune abides. "The rich man withers in his ways;" and therefore, argues the Apostle, he should rejoice when his riches use their wings and fly away. Why? Because trial is good for every man (James i. vers. 2, 4–12). Great reverses of fortune are among the severest tests of character. This truth is based on a true, on a Christian view of human life.

We may not fear riches for ourselves, but do we not fear them for our neighbour? Do we not fear poverty for ourselves and for our friends? A Christian teacher cannot bid us grieve over any reverse by which our character is tested, matured, perfected. In the Christian view of life, *character* is of supreme importance; circumstances are of value only as they serve to form and strengthen and purify it. The wealth and the poverty will soon pass,

but the character will remain, and will decide our destiny. If you say, "Surely it is *very hard* to rejoice, to be honestly and sincerely glad when loss and pain come upon us!" what can any man reply but, "Yes, surely it is very hard, so hard that we shall never do it, except as we possess ourselves of Christ's spirit. Heaven *is* very high; how are we to reach it save by climbing?" The rich man is often like a blade of grass, withering beneath the scorching sun, so that the flower falls off, and its graceful beauty perishes. The sun of prosperity shines upon him with a too-fervent heat; all the beauty and nobility of his character fades under it. He withers away in his "ways," in the multitude of his schemes and pursuits. His fortune grows, but the *man* dies—dies before his time—dies before he ceases to breathe and traffic.

Is not that a true picture, and a sad one? We must all needs die; and, in some of its aspects, even that fact is sad enough. But it is sadder still that many should be as grass which wilfully exposes itself to a heat it might escape, and withers and dies while the field is still green and fragrant.

CONCLUSION.—The warning comes home to us in this age; for our whole life is so intense, that it is almost impossible to make leisure for thought, or for those religious exercises on which our spiritual health depends. We are literally "withering away *in our ways*." We all need to take the warning which speaks to us *as unto men—i.e.*, as to spiritual and immortal creatures, sons of God, and heirs of eternity. If we would not have the world crush us, we must resolutely set ourselves to be in the world as Christ was in the world.—*Samuel Cox, D.D.: Biblical Exposition*, pp. 432–441.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE.

xl. 6. *The voice said, Cry, &c.*

One wonders that there should be so sublime and startling a machinery for the delivery to us of so commonplace a truth. Here is a voice from the firmament. An invisible agency is brought to bear, as though for the announcement of something altogether new and unexpected (cf. Job iv. 15–17). But truths which we never think of disputing may be practically those which we are most in the habit of forgetting. The voice, the apparition, is not needed to impart new truth, but it is needed to impress old truth; what we want is not an increase of knowledge, but the gaining influence for knowledge already possessed.

I. *It is of the first moment that this commonplace announcement should be pressed by all possible means on our attention, because no other announcement could be better adapted for the promotion and growth of the graces of the Gospel.* It is undoubtedly the presumed or the imagined distance of judgment which encourages men to persist in their sins (Eccles. viii. 11). There is a sort of unacknowledged idea that what is protracted and indefinite will never take effect; or it is imagined that life will yet afford numerous opportunities. To overthrow this sinner's theory, and substitute for it the persuasion that "in the midst of life he is in death"—practically to overthrow it—would be to compel him to make provision for the coming eternity, on the threshold of which he may at any moment be standing, and concerning which he is apprised by daily spectacles of mortality. And the effect thus wrought on the unconverted would not be without its parallel in the righteous, on whom we cannot charge the habitual disregard of the dread things of the future. The feeling that the day of death is not near is at work in both. He would say, when inclined to loiter and be slothful in his great work as a

candidate for eternity, "Dare I lose a day, when perhaps but few hours are left; when life is the alone season in which to gain a lofty place in the future kingdom of Christ, and life may be already contracted to a span, so that what I grasp not now may be for ever out of reach?" "What shall I say?" saith a voice from the firmament; the answer of the righteous man should be, "Oh! cry so as to make me feel that 'all flesh is grass; and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field.'"

II. *A supernatural authority is needed to gain any practical hold for a truth which is so readily and universally acknowledged.* We do not require a voice from heaven to make us know that such and such substances are poisonous, when all experience testifies that they are. And are not our churchyards filled with the old and the young?

The Heavenly Voice bade a solemn proclamation to be made of the frailty of life; as though it were ascertained that observation and meditation would never bring it home to man; as though truth must be delivered with all the force and convincingness of a new revelation, ere there were likelihood of its gaining any practical hold.

And if it be a thing for *revelation*, and therefore for prayer, all meditations amongst the tombs will be practically of no worth, except as they bring men to their knees.

It is most important to remember that there is no inherent power in truth to work effectually on the soul. The power is in truth only as applied by the Spirit of God. We must not substitute the Gospel for the Saviour. A voice saith, "Cry!" Your anxiety must be that the thing cried—cried so as to come as a revelation from God—may be our own constant exposure to death (H. E. I. 1557–1566).

CONCLUSION.—Let this be part of your daily prayer to Almighty God (Ps. xxxix. 4). What we need is the being brought to feel old truth, rather than the being brought to recognise new. Oh! cry, cry earnestly, that God will proclaim so as to make you practically and permanently feel this simple, well-known truth—"All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field."—*Henry Melvill, B D.: Golden Lectures*, 1851, pp. 733–740.

I. ISAIAH'S MESSAGE. "All flesh is grass." I also have the same message to publish to my hearers to-day. These words suggest—

1. *Our earthly origin.* The earth is the mother of us all. Every kind of grass has its roots in her, and the most beautiful flower is not ashamed to own its mother. But many conceited people, especially if they have risen in society, are ready to forget the lowliness of their origin. Their parents and the friends of their childhood they would gladly disown. What mean and ignoble vanity!

2. *Our constant dependence upon the earth for our sustenance.*

3. *Our equality.* Some flowers are fairer than others, yet they are made of the same matter. One may be in better soil than another, more sheltered by nature or man's device from the blasting north wind, and more open to the sunlight, but it is the same in substance. When we look round on society, we see men widely different in appearance from each other. How varied have been the circumstances of their birth, education, employment, opportunities, &c.! Yet they are all brethren. A common lot awaits them all (H. E. I. 1536, 1537; P. D. 677).

4. *Our frailty and the uncertainty of our life.* "As the flower of the field." Not the garden flower, defended from storms and intruders by the gardener's devices, but "as the flower of the field!" It opens with beauty in the morning and drinks in the warm rays of the sun; but there is no certainty that a burning tempest will not beat upon it or a beast trample it down before noon. Thus it is with us all. Confidently as the young reckon on seeing many years of happiness, "there is but a step between us

and death" (H. E. I. 1539–1546; P. D. 705, 2225).

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE PROPHET WAS TO DELIVER HIS MESSAGE. "Cry!" Be stirring, earnest, urgent. Not that he who can cry the loudest is the best preacher. But the command suggests—

1. *That there is danger.* A vehement call is an indication of peril. There is danger to the sinner—not to his property, nor even to his body, but to his soul!

2. *That the people do not see their danger.* How true this is! How many are like a man sleeping soundly on the beach while the tide is rapidly surrounding him! Such are some of you. Wonder not, then, that we "cry" to you.

3. *That the people and their danger are coming nearer to each other each moment.* Many, like men working in a hayfield when a thunderstorm is gathering, postpone their escape to the last moment, and often find that the danger was nearer to them than they thought.

4. *That the danger to which the people are exposed is very great.*

5. *That the people are unwilling to hear.*

Life and Works of the late Rev. David Rees, of Lanelly, pp. 87-94.

THE IMPERISHABLENESS OF THE GOSPEL.

xl. 8. *But the Word of our God shall stand for ever.*

A word is a spoken thought. God has spoken His thoughts to man. The record of what He has said is contained in the volume of inspired Scripture. The text affirms that it shall stand for ever. It is appropriated and applied to the Gospel by Peter (1 Pet. i. 24, 25), who quotes this entire passage. The prophet's general affirmation respecting God's Word is applied to the Gospel in particular. It is imperishable. The grass withers. It is fresh and green when growing on the ground. In due time the mower cuts it down, and, lacking the supply of new life, it withers in the sun. The flower is beautiful in the garden. You cannot carry it away exactly as you plucked it. You have cut it off from the sources of its life; and, however carefully you keep it, in a few days it will begin to fade away. Man grows into health and vigour. He is cut down by an invisible hand in the midst of his life-work; or he accomplishes his life-work, and then sinks into decay and forgetfulness. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." But while the grass withers, and the flower fades, and man dies, the Word of our God stands for ever. Our theme, therefore, is *the imperishableness of the Gospel.*

I. IT IS IMPREGNABLE IN ITS EVIDENCE.

The assaults of infidelity have been unable to overthrow it. Its historical records receive confirmation from advancing knowledge. Its prophecies have been historically fulfilled in the most remarkable way. Its miracles are abiding evidence of Divine power brought to bear on the confirmation of its truth. Its moral teaching is exactly adapted to man's moral nature, and presents the loftiest ideal of possible humanity. Its conception of the great central figure, the Lord Jesus Christ, can only be accounted for by its truth. Its distinguishing doctrines are characterised by their clear perception of man's ruined condition, and their provision of what is necessary to his spiritual interest. Its continuance and gradual advancement in the world is a fulfilment of its own prediction, and a perpetual proof that God is with it. The grass has withered season by season; the flowers have faded one by one; the generations of men have followed each other to the land of forgetfulness; but it remains. The attacks upon it, made with fresh vigour and from new points of view, have left it—a fortress often attempted, but never captured. As the sea flows up and

threatens to overwhelm the land day after day, but retires again to its place, so the periodical assaults of infidelity retire like their predecessors, and leave the Gospel as it was (H. E. I. 2418–2427, 2451, 1165–1168).

II. IT IS UNCHANGEABLE IN ITS NATURE.

Notwithstanding the dangers around it, the Gospel continues the same. Human history flows on, like a stream with many variations and windings. Empires rise and fall. Cities grow to magnificence, and decline. Customs and habits change. Opinions become popular or drop into disuse. Physical science as taught in one age is entirely different from physical science as taught in another. Manufacturing processes give way to invention and improvement. New facts are discovered; new truths deduced from them. Human thought is in continual flux. Yet the facts remain. The crust of the earth and the substances it contains are the same. Change is not in the objects studied, but in the knowledge of the student. The same sun shines, the same atmosphere floats around the earth from the beginning; only both are better known. And God is the same, and the Gospel is the same. Different views may be held of some critical questions; more may be known now than formerly of the localities, the history, the customs referred to in Scripture. But Scripture remains. No criticism has expunged any important doctrine. Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." The same way of salvation, the same invitation to the sinful and weary. The Gospel of Paul and Peter and John is the Gospel still. The "faithful saying" is still true and "worthy of all acceptation." The justification by faith which Luther sounded over Europe is the way in which sinners are justified to-day. The need of regeneration with which Whitefield and Wesley awoke the slumbers of England still exists. Men may throw off or modify their opinions of many things, but the essential nature of the Gospel cannot be changed. It is God's final word respecting men's salvation. It must stand for ever.

III. IT IS IMMORTAL IN ITS INFLUENCE.

It stands for ever, not only in the written book, but in the living soul. When believed, it enters the soul as a living force. It completely changes the currents of life. Its influence pervades everything. It touches and turns into gold everything in the man's nature. It removes fear, brings consolation, sanctifies the heart and life. "Being born again."

And when they pass to the better land, it does not cease to live in them. They carry it with them into heaven. It was Christ in them "the hope of glory." They are now glorified together with Him. Christ will never be effaced from their memories. The love of Christ which was felt below is perfected above. The praise of Christ, which was expressed in many a thankful strain, is the celestial song which embodies their living recollections of the Gospel (Rev. v. 9). The Word of God will stand for ever in the thoughts and affections of ransomed souls.

Nor can it, as a vital power in human breasts, pass from the earth. "One generation passeth away and another cometh." The spiritual succession will be maintained to the end of time. Flowers drop their seed before they die, so that from them other flowers may spring. Every Christian desires to leave representatives behind him. Every Christian is an agent; parents, friends, Sabbath-school teachers, ministers. Thus the Gospel lives.

Christians! how great the privilege of an interest in the everlasting Gospel! It nourishes your faith. It rests your soul. It brings daily comfort and strength. It sustains your dearest hopes when all earthly things fade.

See that you discharge your duties to the Gospel. 1. Obey it as the practical expression of your faith. 2. Disseminate it. 3. Believe in its perpetuity and triumph. Away with the drivel about the decay of its influence.

O sinner, consider the bearing of

this on you. You are perishable. So is all around. The imperishable you neglect. Once more it invites. It will survive when you, as to this world, have perished. It is the winning side. At present you are on the losing side. It is preached that it may win you.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The Church's Mission.

xl. 9. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings! &c.*

It is freely asserted that the influence of the Church of Christ is now extremely small. We have been made familiar with statements like these: "The pulpit has lost its power; the Church has lost its hold upon the people; multitudes are hopelessly alienated from the public services of religion." Consider—

I. **The Church's place and function in the world.** What have men a right to expect from her? The text represents the Church as a bearer of good tidings to men. 1. She is exhorted to get up on a high mountain where she will be conspicuous to all, and from which her voice shall reach over Judah's hills, along her vales, and to all her villages and towns. 2. To be courageous and energetic, full of faith, and action, and earnestness in fulfilling her work. 3. She is told what her message ought to be: "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"

II. **So long as the Church is faithful to her mission as the bearer of glad tidings about God, she will be prosperous and powerful.** She is in the world not only to hold fast the truth, but also to hold it forth. She is to echo God's message in human language and with human tenderness. Do not many churches fail in this respect? Some churches are turned into concert-halls, some into homes of priestcraft, some into theological arenas or intellectual gymnasia, and others into places where feeble platitudes about sin and grace, and faith and future happiness abound (H. E. I. 1184–1186).

III. **How much the world needs to hear the good tidings which have been intrusted to the Church of Christ.**

1. *One great and growing evil, threatening us with infinite peril, is the cleaving of society into two great classes—the rich and the poor.* While forces like these drive different classes apart, what is there to draw them together? Higher secular education does not do it. Politics will not do it. Communism or Socialism has tried to do it, but has failed, and must ever fail. It fights against inevitable inequalities. Men, divided from one another in various ways, must be brought under one roof before God (Prov. xxii. 2).

2. *What a terrible fact sin is in human life!* Where it does not transgress the decencies of society, what a disturbing, depressing, enfeebling fact it is in our existence! The Church has here a noble field of influence. She ought to have glad tidings for hearts burdened with transgression, or gnawed by remorse, or wearied in the conflict with impurity, or depressed by the sense of helplessness.

3. *What terrible facts suffering and sorrow are in human life!* The Church's message to the suffering and sorrowful is an infinitely tender and precious one. These should go forth from her courts relieved and comforted. Her Lord and Master was a great sufferer—was made perfect through suffering. "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"

4. *What a terrible fact death is in human life!* Where, how, when, shall we die? From whom can we learn anything of death? Science can explain the chemistry of our decay, can talk wisely about the conservation of energy; but we want something more. Philosophy has loved to speak of death; the Epicurean saying, "Let us eat," &c.; the Stoic, "Death is universal and inevitable; let us meet it bravely and with dignity." But we are

only shocked and chilled. Poetry has sought to throw a charm around death; but even poetry cannot satisfy our yearning. It is reserved for the Church to justify her title as "the bringer of good tidings" by unfolding to men her God-given revelations concerning death. To her it has been given to take the sting from death, the triumph from the grave. She provides a Guide who never fails in the valley of the shadow of death. Pointing to One who hung upon the cross, lay in the grave, and rose through the clouds to heaven, she can say to all, "Behold your God!" (ch. xliii. 2, 3).—*William Young, B.A.: Christian World Pulpit*, xx. pp. 330–332.

The Preacher's Task.

(*Ordination or Missionary Sermon.*)

xl. 9. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings! &c.*

This chapter commences the second part of Isaiah's prophecies, in which the local and national is less prominent than in the former, and the visions are carried forward to the time of Messiah. The prophet hears voices, each of which contains a message of consolation. The first bids him announce the coming of the King and command the preparation of His way; the second affirms the everlasting duration of the Lord's Word; the third calls attention to the fact of His coming.

The third is our text. It is differently rendered in the margin. "O thou that tellest good tidings unto Zion; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem." This version is adopted in Handel's Oratorio. It is generally preferred. It makes Zion and Jerusalem the recipients of the good tidings along with the cities of Judah.

God's strong hand would terminate the long Babylonian captivity, and lead His people back, as a shepherd leads his flock. But beyond this is the great salvation the Messiah would accomplish. The call is addressed to those whose business is to proclaim that salvation. Their occupation is described; their challenge is dictated; their methods are prescribed; their sphere is defined.

I. Their occupation is described. They are evangelists: tellers of good tidings—a suitable description of the preachers of the Gospel, and their work. The Gospel contains the good news men need. The world lies in ruin. It is sick. It has no power of recuperation. Its disease produces a fatal unwillingness to be cured, if only its consequences may be escaped. The preacher is charged with the good news that the disease can be cured, its consequences averted, the dislike of recovery removed. God's love in Christ is the essence of the news (John iii. 16, 17). If it came to you for the first time, you would say it as the most astonishing statement possible. It involves the whole work of Christ. It involves the proclamation of God's readiness to forgive and cleanse the sinner. It is salvation.

Whoever makes this known to any one previously ignorant of it is an evangelist—a teller of good tidings—a preacher of the Gospel. Conventionally this name is given to a professional class. There are many reasons for the existence of such a class. But serious loss is sustained, if the preaching of the Gospel is confined to them. Others should also preach. Parents, Sunday-school teachers, friends in conversation, letters, visitors of the ignorant and neglected, distributors of tracts and books. Every man who has heard and believed the glad tidings should himself be an evangeliser. Every Christian is such a man. He has not heard a secret, but a glorious truth which he is to proclaim.

II. Their challenge is dictated. The announcement of the glad tidings of salvation does not terminate in itself. It is proclaimed with a view to action. "Behold your God." Hence the Gospel is a manifestation of God

and a summons to man. 1. *A manifestation of God.* He is the Author of the salvation, the Doer of the great and gracious things announced. When surveying a manufactory and its machinery, your thoughts turn to the manufacturer and the engineer. Going over a hospital, you think of the benevolence of the man by whom it was built and endowed. Studying the heavens and the earth, you think of their Maker's power and skill. So when you think of the Gospel, think of God. It is the medium through which He is best known. His full manifestation waited for the incarnation of His Son (H. E. I. 855–857). "The world by wisdom knew not God." That was true of the ancient world. It is true still. Men think and dream about God. But they do not know Him until they come in humility to the Cross. It reveals His holiness and His love. It shows Him righteous, yet delighting in mercy. And this representation of Him has ever been most effective in the reclamation of the heathen from idolatry. Judaism was comparatively uninfluential. When Christianity arose, the idols fell (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). The overthrow of ancient idolatry was the work of two or three hundred years. Modern heathenism is falling in like manner before the manifestation of God in Christ as the redeeming God. 2. *A summons to man.* "Behold your God!" This is the action required on the part of those to whom the Gospel is addressed. Men must not turn away from the manifestation of God. If a prince were to show himself in an impoverished part of his dominions for the purpose of relieving the people's wants, would indifference become them? Would they not look to him? This is the look the Gospel demands. Behold Him with the eye of faith. When you carry the Gospel to others, call upon them thus to behold Him. If there are those here who are not saved, we call on you thus to behold Him. As the Israelites, when bitten by the serpents, were told to look to the serpent of brass, we tell you to look to Jesus (John i. 29; Isa. xlv. 22). Helpless and ruined without Him, we proclaim salvation by Him, and call upon you to look and live.

III. THEIR METHODS ARE PRESCRIBED.

1. For the message they must endeavour to secure *publicity.* "Get thee up into the high mountain," where you can be seen and heard. Go where the people are; seek the centres of population; avail yourselves of all circumstances to attract attention.

2. The message must be delivered with *energy.* "Lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up." As if you believed in it, realised its importance, sympathised with its gladness. Bring into the announcement the vigour of mind and body that is born of earnestness.

3. The message must be proclaimed with *courage.* "Be not afraid." Fearless preaching carries authority and weight. The Gospel has never wanted men of such courage. And it is displayed. Recent offer of Christian young men in South Sea island to take the place of the teachers massacred in New Guinea.

IV. THEIR SPHERE IS DEFINED.

"Zion, Jerusalem, the cities of Judah." Every one must have a definite work. It will gradually expand from nearest relations and friends to neighbours, our country, the world.

Tell it, brethren, because—1. It is time. 2. It is needed. 3. Its proclamation is commanded. 4. Success is assured. 5. Faithful service will be rewarded.—*J. Rawlinson.*

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

xl. 11. *He shall feed His flock, &c.*

The Hebrews were, for the most part, a nation of shepherds. To them especially these declarations must have appeared full of beauty, tenderness, and life.

I. THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

"He shall feed," &c.

1. *Who is this Shepherd?* He who was foretold by the prophets (Ezek. xxxiv. 23; Micah v. 4, vii. 14). In the New Testament it is declared that these prophecies were fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet. v. 4; Heb. xiii. 20; John x. 11).

2. *What is He?* God as well as man (ver. 10; Zech. xiii. 7; Micah v. 4). Being truly God, He is well qualified to be "the Good Shepherd." He never slumbers nor sleeps. His knowledge is infinite, His power almighty, His resources limitless. He has in His heart infinite tenderness, which He manifested by dying for His flock.

II. THE FLOCK FOR WHICH HE CARES.

His flock? The people of God (Ps. c. 3). Weak, wandering, defenceless in themselves, they depend entirely upon Him for succour and safety.

The whole flock of Christ is known by distinct marks. 1. *It is a little flock.* Small compared with the great assembly of saints in heaven, or with the multitudes led captive by Satan. Not because He is unable or unwilling to save. His fold is large enough for the whole world; its door is open for all mankind, and He stands at it inviting all to enter. The real reason (John iii. 19, v. 40). 2. *It is a united flock.* Its members live by "one faith" in "one Lord," and are united in principles, in affection, in conduct, in devotion, in destiny (H. E. I. 1202, 1203). 3. *It is a holy flock.* Holy in heart, in conversation, in conduct (H. E. I. 2831, 2856).

Besides the marks which distinguish the whole flock of Christ, others distinguish its individual members. 1. *A death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness* (John iii. 5). 2. *Hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd* (John x. 3). 3. *Following Him* (John x. 4).

III. HIS CARE FOR IT.

Mark—1. *His general care for His people.* "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd." His eye watches over them; His arm protects them; His grace supplies their need (Ezek. xxxiv. 11–16).

2. *His peculiar tenderness to the young.* "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." His tender care for children (Mark x. 13–16; Prov. viii. 17). For young converts. A lamb just dropped on a bleak mountain, where the cold wind rages, where the stormy rain descends, where the wolf, gaunt and grim, prowls around for prey;—such a lamb in such a state is a figure of young Christians in this wicked world. But the Good Shepherd, who watches over them with infinite tenderness night and day, will support them in all their weakness and dangers, and succour them in all their wants and sorrows. When a shepherd sees a young lamb so weak that it cannot keep up with the rest of the flock, he does not leave it behind to die, but takes it up and carries it. Thus does Jesus (text). He pardons their sins, gives them peace, invigorates their souls, and enables them to go on their way (H. E. I. 961).

3. *His singular compassion for the feeble and the burdened.* "He shall gently lead those that are with young." Almighty, all-wise, all-merciful, He is well qualified to lead the afflicted. He will lead them in the right way, in the best way, gently. His sympathy and His succour will never fail them.—*John Cawood, M.A.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 363–378).

JESUS AND THE LAMBS.

xl. 11. *He shall gather the lambs with His arm, &c.*

Greatness in league with gentleness, and power linked with affection pass before us in this chapter (vers. 10, 11).

I. Who are the lambs our Lord is said to gather and carry in His bosom?

1. In a certain sense we may affirm that *all His people are lambs.* In so far

as they exhibit the Christian spirit, they are lamb-like. As the lamb might be presented in sacrifice, so every believer presents his body as a living sacrifice unto God. He hates wars and fightings. Jesus will gather all such lambs.

2. The word "lamb" frequently signifies *the young;* and our Lord graciously receives many young persons into His bosom. Jesus always had children among His auditory (Matt. xix. 14). Youthful piety should not be mistrusted. Children should be invited to declare their faith in the Lord Jesus, and to come forward and be joined to the Church of Jesus. Let them hear the words of the Good Shepherd (Prov. viii. 17; H. E. I. 795–800).

3. *Young converts,* those who begin to have religious impressions; those who have recently repented of sin, and been driven from confidence in their own good works (ch. xlii. 3).

4. *Those who are naturally of a weak, timid, trembling disposition.* Their needs demand our sympathetic attention. Jesus seeks them out.

5. *Those who know but little of the things of God.* This class is not so much desponding as ignorant (John xiv. 9).

II. How does Jesus show this special care for the weak ones?

1. *By gathering them.* The shepherd watches carefully when the little lambs are born. He watches, when the flock is on the march, lest the lambs lag behind. He knows their skittish nature. He gathers them, and keeps them **under his own eye.**

2. *By carrying them in His bosom* (H. E. I. 961). (1.) *As the safest place.* Who can hope to take His bosom-treasure away from Jesus? (2.) *The tenderest place.* Soft for hurt little ones. (3.) *The easiest place.* It makes one wish to be always a lamb, if one could always ride in that chariot. (4.) *The most honourable place.* We would not put into our bosom that which we despised.

3. *By His teachings.* These are simple, mostly in parables, full of winning illustrations, and always plain. (1.) *He reveals His teachings gradually.* He gives milk before He offers strong meat; does not hang our salvation upon our understanding mysteries. (2.) *His experimental teachings are all by degrees too.* He suits the burden to the back.

4. *By the solemn curses with which He effectually guarded the little ones* (Matt. xviii. 6–10).

5. *By the promises made on purpose for the weak.*

6. *By requiring of them what is easy* (Matt. xi. 29, 30). He does not send the weak believers to the forefront of the battle, as David did Uriah.

7. *By accepting the least service that these little ones may offer.*

III. Wherefore this care of Christ towards the lambs of His flock?

1. Because *the weak are as much redeemed by the blood of Christ as the strong.* A man will not lose a thing which cost him his blood.

2. *Because in the new-born child of God there are peculiar beauties which are not so apparent in others.* The first love of the beginner is well known. The first tenderness of conscience; the first intense delight in the service of God.

3. *Because they will become strong one day* (Mark iv. 28). Jesus sees them as they are to be (H. E. I. 1071).

4. *Because Christ's suretyship engagements require that He should preserve the weakest as well as the strongest* (John xvii. 6; Jude 24).

5. *Because of His promises* (John x. 28).

6. *Because compassion argues that if any should be watched it should be these* (H. E. I. 952–958).

IV. Practical Conclusion.

1. Let us gather the lambs. (1.) For Christ. (2.) Into His Church.

2. Let us carry in our bosoms those who are gathered (Exod. ii. 9).—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,* 1868, pp. 73–84.

This promise concerns "the lambs" of Christ's flock. He is a mighty

Shepherd (see vers. 10, 12); but He does not despise "the lambs," those who are feeble, ignorant, and conscious of their helplessness. He carries them in His bosom! What does this imply? 1. *His boundless affection for them.* On the cross He has given costly proof of it; and always His is a love that expresses itself in actions, not in words merely. 2. *Their tender nearness to Him.* How sweet it is to lie on the bosom of the Good Shepherd! 3. *Their absolute safety.* If He has in His heart love enough, and in His arm power enough to protect them, then for the lamb to perish is as impossible as it is for *Him* to perish (H. E. I. 934–941).

1. *This presentation of Christ has a kindly aspect toward the sinner.* How gentle is that Mighty Being to whom we invite you, on whom we counsel you to rest! 2. *There is encouragement here for those who feel themselves the weakest and feeblest of all God's children* (H. E. I. 959, 960). 3. *There is no encouragement here for those who are wilfully weak.* For what purpose does the Good Shepherd cherish? It is that He may sanctify. It is not merely to preserve, to protect; but He nourishes His lambs that they may grow.—*J. H. Evans, M.A.: Thursday Penny Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 324–336.

The Mind of Christ Toward the Young.

(*Sunday-School Anniversary.*)

xl. 11. *He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.*

The earlier verses of this chapter are sufficient to prove that these words were written of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. ver. 3, and Luke iii. 3–6). Seven hundred years before the appearing of our Saviour, a prophecy was given of His character; of His tenderness in guiding, protecting, and feeding the souls of those who should be brought to put their trust in Him,—more especially in cherishing and watching over the weaker and the younger members of His flock (cf. John x. 11, 27, 28).

Let us inquire how far this predicted character of the Messiah was fulfilled in the recorded deeds and works of Jesus Christ upon earth.

1. How precisely does Mark x. 13–16 set before us the Good Shepherd gathering the lambs with His arm! How precisely does it declare His readiness to receive and bless little children! (H. E. I. 765.) (1.) How great a comfort to pious parents who now dedicate their children to Him! (P. D. 464, 465.) (2.) How gracious an encouragement to those who in early years begin to seek Him! (P. D. 962, 963.)

2. In Mark x. 17–22 we read that a young man came running to Jesus, with every sign of earnestness, docility, and reverence, to ask what he must do to inherit eternal life. Our Lord saw in him that self-satisfied spirit which immediately appeared in reply to our Lord's answer to his question: "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Then our Lord gave a direction, designed, not to teach us the method of our salvation, but to bring to light the plague of the young man's heart. The event showed that he was not then prepared to enter into the kingdom of God (H. E. I. 3591, 1889, 3567–3569). Yet there was that in his serious and respectful demeanour, his ingenuous simplicity, and his outward blamelessness which our Lord regarded with deep and affectionate interest (Mark x. 21). He showed that interest by mercifully revealing to him his sad and fatal defect, and urging him to lay the axe to the root of his sins, and to follow Him. From this incident we may learn with how deep an interest our Lord regards that ingenuous openness, that blameless morality, that dutiful and reverent simplicity which is the greatest charm of youth; and yet how far all this may at last fall short of the character of an heir to the kingdom of God (H. E. I. 3603, 3606, 4080–4105).

3. Another manifestation of the mind of Christ towards the young is seen in this, that He takes the character of a little child as the type of that which distinguishes His true disciples (Matt. xi. 25, xviii. 2–4). He who so acted and spoke must have had a singular tenderness of feeling towards little children. Doubtless that which commended them to Him was their instinctive feeling of weakness, and of dependence upon others for all things; their consciousness of ignorance, and simple faith in all that is told them by those older than themselves; the absence in them of guile, ambition, hypocrisy, and all assumption. Our sharing in these qualities, and our display of them toward Christ, is essential to our very safety (P. D. 964).

4. Remember also the solemn earnestness with which He denounces a woe against all who lead them into sin (Matt. xviii. 6). Probably "the little ones" here spoken of are those who *resemble* little children; but still they are peculiarly applicable to children, so liable to be drawn away from Him by the force of evil influence or example (H. E. I. 775).

5. Christ did not disdain the praises of little children (Matt. xxi. 15, 16).

6. Remember His charge to Peter: "Feed my lambs." Those thus referred to might be rather the weak in faith than the young in years, yet in many cases the two would be identical; the young would be also weak. For these their parents should tenderly care (H. E. I. 781–788, 803–806). But when the parents do not discharge that sacred trust, the Church should see to it that the young souls for which Christ died do not perish for lack of knowledge.—*C. J. Vaughan: Sermons*, 1846, pp. 328–342.

The Gentleness of Christ to the Burdened.

xl. 11. *He shall gently lead those that are with young.*

We have here an indirect proof of the Deity of our Lord. Infinite power is required to control the movements of the burdened ones of whom our text speaks; so *many* as He has to lead! Besides, He must have infinite wisdom to know *me*. I am a mystery to myself; though myself be a book that I study, and ought to study far more than I do, yet how little do I know of it! How then can He know all of them, and each one singly!—know all the maze, the whole of the labyrinth, the "wheel within wheel," the winding path within the winding path, of body, soul, and estate; all that bears on me in my relative positions, in my connection with the Church, in connection with my family; all my personal weaknesses, my constitutional infirmities? Unless He does know this He cannot "lead" me. He must be God who doeth these things. And He *is* God. May our hearts bow before Him!

I. **Christ's people are often burdened.** Sin, their inborn corruption, is a burden to them. Still heavier is the burden when they have been betrayed into actual transgression; a guilty conscience is a heavy burden indeed. The slowness with which he makes progress in spiritual excellences is also to the believer a burden. Sorrows and temptations are burdens. The body itself is a burden (2 Cor. v. 4). The service of God has itself a burden in it; we read of "bearing the burden and heat of the day." Often, too, he feels the burdens of others—their mistakes, follies, and sufferings, to rest heavily upon him.

II. **When they are thus burdened they experience the infinite tenderness of the Good Shepherd.**

1. He does not drive them; He *leads* them. Satan drives his miserable victims to perdition; the Saviour leads His ransomed ones along the paths of righteousness to eternal blessedness.

2. He leads them *gently*. Who can unfold the wondrous tenderness, patience, forbearance, compassion, and

love with which He has lead each one of us? He leads "gently," not foolishly; not with such tenderness as one sometimes sees in earthly parents, leading their children to their harm, and thinking it to be love,—the worst of all unkindness. It is the kindness of One that wisely loves. Could I suppose a father taking a knife to amputate the limb of his child, there might be an appearance of severity in the sharpness of the knife, but who can tell what would be the tenderness of that yearning father's heart? He "gently leads," and never more tenderly than in some providences that appeared the severest at the time. As Cowper has said, it is but the graver aspect of His love.—*J. H. Evans, M.A.: Thursday Penny Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 337–348.

God Incomparable.

(*For Trinity Sunday.*)

xl. 18. *To whom then will ye liken God? &c.*

The extreme point which has ever been reached by objectors to the doctrine of the Trinity is the point of incomprehensibleness, not the point of impossibility. The doctrine, though incomprehensible as to the manner, can never be proved impossible as to the fact (H. E. I. 4811–4814). The same may be said of the Deity, or any of His attributes, *e.g.*, Eternity, Omnipresence. Reason is required to submit to Revelation when she cannot comprehend. We might almost say that until truth is beyond (not opposed to) Reason, it does not strictly belong to Revelation (H. E. I. 537, 1087, 2022–2024).

The text is a simple but energetic assertion, couched in the form of a question, of the impossibility of finding any likeness or resemblance to God.

I. The Creator is distinguished from every creature by being self-existent. 1. No way of accounting for the origin of anything except by supposing something which never had an origin. It was an ancient inscription in a *heathen* temple, "I am whatsoever was, is, or shall be; and who is he that shall draw aside my veil?" 2. The existence of a Creator is a *necessary* existence. This should prepare us to find God inscrutable. To depict an Archangel, one has but to remodel himself; but how begin to depict God, the *Uncreated*?

II. Hence the vanity of all attempts to explain or illustrate the Trinity in Unity. 1. If we could produce an exact instance of three in one, we should have no right to point to it as at all parallel with the union in the Godhead (H. E. I. 4816–4821). Man was made in the *moral* image of his Maker. It is the image of the *nature* which the text says it is impossible to find. Still some use may be made of illustration.

III. Is it possible that there may be three persons in the Godhead, consistently with that unity which Scripture unreservedly ascribes to the Divine Being? 1. Observe man's constitution. All confess he is made up of a body and a soul. Apart from seeing this union effected, we might have thought it impossible. It is a union of quite different natures. Why should he not unite two things of the *same* nature, *e.g.*, two spirits? If with two, then with three; the possibility does not depend upon the number. Thus we admit the incomprehensible, but we disprove the impossible. 2. The foregoing illustration shows no unmindfulness of the truth that we cannot find a likeness to the everlasting God. It shows from what is possible in *created* being the unreasonableness of pronouncing a certain constitution impossible in the *uncreated* Being. "Wonderful Being! who has only to tell what He is to make Himself more inscrutable."

IV. Note the practical character of the doctrine of the Trinity. 1. The

whole of Christianity falls to pieces, if you destroy this doctrine. If this doctrine be false, Christ Jesus is nothing more than a man, and the Holy Ghost a creature of quality. That truth cannot be a barren speculation which may not be believed or disbelieved without affecting the Christian character. 2. Reflect upon prayer. Prayer must be prescribed and regulated by the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a *false* god whom man worships, if he adores Unity in which there is no Trinity. The heathen bows down before a stock or a stone, the Socinian before a Godhead in which there is no Son and no Holy Spirit. Without a Trinity, man must save himself; with a Trinity, he is to be saved through Christ. 3. Our duty. Whilst no likeness can be found to the invisible uncreated God, we are to study conformity to the image of His Son. Resemblance to Christ is the nearest approach to resemblance to God (Col. iii. 4). See Outline: THE TRINITY IN UNITY, vol. i. pp. 133, 134.—*Henry Melvill, B.D.: Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 284–308.

The passage suggests:—I. *That the greatest things in the material world are nothing to God.* The ocean, the heaven, the earth (ver. 12; Ps. xxxiii. 8, 9).

II. *That the greatest minds in the spiritual universe are nothing to Him* (vers. 13, 14). He is uninstructible: the only Being in the universe who is so. He is absolutely original: the only such Being. We talk of original thinkers; such creatures are mere fictions. He being so independent of all minds:—1. *His universe must be regarded as the expression of Himself.* No other being had a hand in it (H. E. I. 1491–1497; P. D. 631). 2. *His laws are the revelation of Himself.* No one counselled Him in His legislation. 3. *His conduct is absolutely irresponsible.* He is answerable to no one. He alone is irresponsible, and He alone can be trusted with irresponsibility.

III. *That the greatest institutions in human society are nothing to Him.* Nations are the greatest things in human institutions. Nations, with their monarchs, courts, armies — Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome—these are great things in history (ver. 15). Islands (vers. 15–17).

IV. *That the greatest productions of human labour are nothing to Him.* Perhaps in all ages the highest productions of human genius have been in connection with religion. Religion has had the finest architecture, carvings, sculpture, paintings, &c. But what are they to Him? (vers. 18–20).

CONCLUSION.—How great is God! Well might the Moslems cry in their prayers, *Allah hûakbar!*—"God is great." "There is," said an eloquent French preacher, "nothing great but God" (P. D. 1493, 1502, 1508).—*David Thomas, D.D.: The Homilist*, Editor's Series, vol. xi. p. 167.

THE UNIVERSE AND MAN.

xl. 26. *Lift up your eyes on high, &c.*

We find in the text—not obscurely, not ambiguously, but with the clearness and positiveness of knowledge—

I. That God should not be confounded with His works, but apprehended as the personal and living Author of all. This faith is conspicuous throughout the whole Bible. The first verse of the Book is an explicit declaration of it. On this foundation the Book rests, and from it it is never moved. In this the Bible writers stood alone in the world. The wisdom of Egypt and Assyria gave them no countenance; they lacked the sympathy, to a large extent, of their own nation. This old Hebrew faith stands as firmly in the light of modern science. Sir Isaac Newton declared that the cause of the universe could

not be mechanical; Galileo saw God as clearly as Newton in the heavens, whose scientific prophet he was.

That we moderns know more of the material universe scientifically than did the ancients is not to be questioned; but while the Hebrew writers used popular language, they were preserved from mixing the false or inaccurate science of their times with their religious teachings. But while they *knew* less of the vastness of the universe than we do now, they did not *feel* it less. The modern scientist's awe in the contemplation of it may not be in proportion to his knowledge; the Hebrews knew enough and saw enough to produce the profoundest feeling, and more scientific knowledge would scarcely have added to the depth or intensity of their feeling.

II. That which God created He sustains. "For that He is strong in power, not one faileth." But are not the laws of Nature self-working and constant? Constant, certainly; self-working, in the sense of being independent of their Author, as a well-made clock is of its maker, is not, to say the least, so evident. The Hebrew Scriptures affirm the constancy of Nature more consistently than some modern scientists. God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass," &c., and the fruit-tree yielding fruit "*after its kind.*" "God created every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, *after their kind*, and every winged fowl *after its kind.* And God saw that it was good." "And God made the beast of the earth *after its kind*, and cattle *after their kind*, and everything that creepeth upon the earth *after its kind.*" And man, we may add, has produced "after his kind." Nature has been constant; all history proves it. The Bible traces it to its source in an ordinance of the Creator. God saw that it was good. Good it was, — a most beneficent decree (H. E. I. 3157). Anything else would have turned human forethought and activity into folly, and would have furnished a new illustration of the old Greek notion of a fortuitous concourse of atoms. It is not by the Bible, nor by believers in it, that the constancy of Nature is now doubted; it is by a very bold and boastful section of scientific men, who do not believe that things have always produced after their kind. But the Bible asserts with equal explicitness a continued Divine agency in Nature. It tells us that God still *causeth* the grass to grow for the cattle, &c. (Ps. civ. 14). "My Father worketh hitherto," said Christ. The Sabbath-rest was not a cessation from Divine activity. The best of our living astronomers, as well as the greatest of the past, believe that "the heavens declare the glory of God," that they are sustained in their immensely complicated but most orderly structure and relations by the power of their Maker; they accept the words of the prophet as containing the conclusion to which science shuts us up. Nor are they offended by the metaphoric or poetic form in which the sublime conception is here expressed; poetic in form, it is true in fact. How consoling is this thought! When we think of the physical possibilities of the universe or of our own globe, we may tremble. Our fear is allayed, not so much by the idea of the regularity and stability of Nature, as by the assurance that God reigneth (2 Pet. iii. 7.)

III. These truths are made the foundation of comfort, primarily to the ancient Israel of God, and equally to all the spiritual Israel (vers. 27–29). The vastness of the universe in nowise detracts from nor diminishes God's care over the human race. The prophet's argument seems almost an inversion of our Lord's (Matt. vi. 26). Suns and stars are glorious things; we are as atoms and worms in comparison (Ps. viii. 3, 4). But if this feeling is turned into an argument to place us at a distance from God, there is a reply to it from His own mouth (ch. lxvi. 1, 2). More than this, the Bible story of creation gives us the keynote of the Bible idea of man. The earth was made for him, and he was made in the image of God. The material uni

verse, which "was made glorious, has no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth." This idea lies at the foundation of the whole Christian scheme, which assumes both the "majesty and the misery of man." If man is not a glorious being, he is not worth the expenditure by which he has been redeemed; if he is not fallen, he does not need the redemption of Christ. If we be "human atoms," as a modern Pantheist calls us, without personal relations to God, "dots of animated jelly," to be absorbed by and by into the mass from which we have been taken, assuredly the Christian redemption is uncalled for and incredible. The African traveller was cheered, when almost dying, by discovering a tuft of living moss. But if we understand things as the prophet did, not only every blade of grass that grows, but every star that shines, justifies faith in the providential love and care of our Heavenly Father. Happy if, in addition to this, we can enter into full sympathy with the apostolic argument! (Rom. viii. 32).—*John Kennedy, D.D.: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. vi. pp. 225–227.

Cheer for the Desponding.

xl. 26–31. *Lift up your eyes on high, &c.*

These encouraging assurances must have been of the highest value to the captive and disconsolate Jews in Babylon. Banished for so long a period from the land of their fathers, they were ready to fear that they were outcasts from God. And they are of the utmost value now, for even now the people of God are in times of trouble often tempted to take a dark and depressing view of God's dealings and dispensation. *Then* let them consider the facts here brought before us.

I. In His providential government, God exerts on behalf of His children the same almighty power which at first created and still sustains all worlds (vers. 26, 27). When by the aid of astronomy we attempt to conceive of the vastness of the universe, we are not only astonished, but confounded. Two thousand stars are said to be visible to the naked eye; but astronomers declare that there are 250,000,000 of them. What an evidence of the affluence of God's creative energy! The same power that at first called them into being must be perpetually put forth in regulating their movements, sustaining their harmony, and controlling their mutual influences (H. E. I. 362–365). Surely, He whose eye can discern, whose arm upholds millions of worlds, can distinctly survey and effectually preserve and bless every individual of His redeemed family, without overlooking or disregarding the minutest of their concerns (cf. vers. 10, 11; Luke xii. 6, 7; Phil. iv. 6, 7; Rom. viii. 28. H. E. I. 4015–4022).

II. In ordering the concerns of His people, God exercises the same wisdom which He displays in regulating the constitution and course of Nature (vers. 27, 28). His wisdom is equal to His power. To Him causes and effects, tendencies and results, are alike known. The events both of the past and the future lie distinctly before Him (H. E. I. 2264, 2268). How great, then, is the encouragement to refer *all* our interests to Him with whom an error in judgment is a thing unknown, and a mistake impossible! (H. E. I. 4049–4057.)

III. God is pleased to impart ample and diversified communications of grace to those who wait upon Him. Of those who receive from Him renewal of strength it is said, "They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." These words seem to imply that there are those of whom *all* this elevation of spirit, buoyancy of heart, and untiring alertness in their prescribed course may be asserted. But there are many

more to whom *some one* of these capabilities is imparted without the others. 1. The first part of the description presents to us a favoured class of devout worshippers, distinguished by fervour of spirit in their approaches to the throne of grace, so that they are enabled to soar far above this lower region of cares, fears, and turmoils into a higher and serener atmosphere, where they attain to more realising views of God in Christ, and more intimate, joy-inspiring, and transforming communion with Him. Such were Baxter, John Howe, Leighton, Watts, Doddridge, and other poets of the sanctuary who have aided the upward flight of redeemed spirits. There are such men still among those who here wait upon God. 2. There are other Christians, whose minds are less buoyant, whose affections are less fervid, and whose imagination is less vivid; but, by the grace of God, they run with persevering energy the race set before them, and are not weary. 3. There are others of whom it can only be said—yet, blessed be God, it *can* be said—"They walk and do not faint." Their movement is less rapid than that of the former classes, but still they are making constant progress in the path of duty and safety. Some of them are aged, infirm, afflicted, or tried, harassed, and tempted; but still they look unto Jesus, and "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no power He increaseth strength" (Ps. lxix. 33; H. E. I. 952–961, P. D. 474).

IV. Divine aid is necessary to support even the strongest. Without it, "even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall." There may be an allusion here to young men selected for military service, singled out as the most vigorous, active, and athletic. As even these cannot secure for themselves the continuance of their health and strength for a single day, so for vigour of faith, fervour in love, energy in obedience, we depend on the grace which renders us "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (H. E. I. 2351–2358).

V. Divine aid is sufficient to strengthen even the weakest. From God comes the strength of the strongest, and in Him they trusted. David (Ps. lxviii. 17, lxxi. 16). Paul (2 Cor. xii. 5–10). In all times of need and depression, let us look to the same Helper; we shall not look in vain (H. E. I. 4789–4981).—*H. F. Burder, D.D.: Sermons*, pp. 262–278

The Christian's life is a continual warfare. Nor has he any strength but in God. He is prone to reflect more on his own weakness than on God's power.

I. THE DISCOURAGEMENTS OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

1. *Temporal afflictions.* (1.) Pain and sickness. (2.) Losses and poverty, —sometimes rendered heavier by the unkindness of friends and calumny. Job sank for a time under their weight (Job iii. 1, xxvii. 2).

2. *Spiritual troubles.* (1.) Corruptions of the heart. (2.) Unsuccessful conflicts. (3.) Temptations of Satan. (4.) Desolations of Zion (H. E. I. 1059–1062, 2457, 3398, 3949–3951).

II. THE SUPPORTS WHICH GOD WILL BESTOW.

God is never at a loss for means to succour His people (ver. 28). 1. *He is not lacking in tenderness and compassion.* (1.) He has given them a sympathising High Priest (Heb. iv. 15). (2.) Accepts their weak endeavours (ver. 31). (3.) Infirmities are no bar to His favours (Matt. xii. 20; H. E. I. 2313–2315). 2. *He expects, however, that they "wait upon" Him.* (1.) Prayer is necessary (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). (2.) Effectual aid obtained by *waiting* (Deut. xxxiii. 25). The drooping shall "mount up," &c.; they that had utterly fallen shall "run;" they shall march onward in spite of all opposition; they shall never faint through want of strength or courage. (3.) None shall be disappointed in his hope (Ps. xl. 1, 2).

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

1. To those who bless themselves that they have never felt such dis-

couragements. Such ignorance argues an utter ignorance of true religion (Gal. v. 17). 2. To those who are now discouraged. Though the sources are many from whence difficulties arise, God is an all-sufficient Helper to those who trust in Him (2 Cor. xii. 10; Phil. iv. 13). They shall soon be able to attest the truth of the prophet's assertion (xxx. 18).—*Charles Simeon, M.A.: Skeletons*, pp. 202–204.

This is the language of Isaiah's despondency and consolation.

Sorrow may be said to be the heritage of us all. God never intended man's life to be a perpetual song. He made the roses and the thorns, the sunlight and the shadows. But to all who either feel or utter the prophet's lament God sends the prophet's consolation.

I. GOD'S POWER IS THE COMFORT OF HIS PEOPLE.

The problems of our life have no solution if we turn away from God. Life, when we turn to God, is never cruel and hard, however full of trial it may be. God has surrounded us on every side with reminders of what He is. 1. His power is painted on the sky. 2. His power is seen on earth.

II. GOD'S TENDERNESS IS, &c.

This is seen rightly only in conjunction with His greatness. We see the tender in contrast with the mighty. "The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth," stoops to give power to the faint. Tenderness is strength in gentle action. Gentleness is not weakness, but calm, quiet, loving strength. The Great Father has also a mother's tenderness (P. D. 1499). He giveth power to the faint. Not He gave; not He shall give; but He giveth (H. E. I. 2304). HE GIVETH!—that is God's name. He who fainteth not is drawn to those who do faint; and to the faint He giveth power. There is nothing so mighty as the faintness and weakness which takes hold of the Divine strength. It has omnipotence behind it (2 Cor. xii. 9).

In Christ how is this character given Him by the prophet confirmed! Strong to exorcise devils, yet how tender with His disciples' faults; strong to still the storm, yet so touched by His disciples' trouble; strong to raise the dead, yet so tender to weep tears of natural sorrow (H. E. I. 951–961).

III. GOD'S WISDOM IS, &c.

"There is no searching of His understanding." This is not to say much if it only means that we cannot search it; but there *is* no searching of it. God's infinite wisdom is to us the needful complement of His infinite power.

CONCLUSION. — *We* cannot understand, but God knows all. Some plan there is in our changeful life. We can only rest in the thought of His wisdom, His tenderness, His power.

And Christ! He is the wisdom of God, the love, the tenderness of God. Away from Christ, there is no certainty, no rest; and hope is quenched in darkness.—*Henry Wonnacott: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xvi. pp. 180–182.

SPIRITUAL DESPONDENCY.

xl. 27–31. *Why sayest thou, O Jacob? &c.*

Here is no mere utterance of the complaints of the people; for although the more earnest Jews of the day doubtless did feel that God had forsaken them, *the prophet* had felt it with the keenest agony. Consider the circumstances in which Isaiah was placed when the text was written. 1. He had been prophesying for fifty years with but few glimpses into the splendour of the future, and without any indications in the people of the beneficial results of his mission. 2. Imagine now his position. Summoned to prophesy with the strange warning that his words would harden the people (chap. vi. 9, 10), he had found for half a century the truth of

that mysterious commission. He had seen words both of the most awful woe and of the tenderest love alike fail to rouse the people from their dreams. Invasion after invasion swept over the land; he had just seen the people panic-stricken at the approach of the dread Assyrian army; had beheld their hosts wither in a night before the breath of the Destroyer. Another and darker invasion, which would carry them captive to Babylon, had shaped itself before his prophetic eye. Must not the grey old man have been more than human if he had not been tempted, in some moments, to cry in utter gloom, "The Lord has forgotten me?" 3. In the midst of that deep depression, the new revelation, which begins with a shout of joy in this chapter, opened before him in its glory. The old question came back, with its grand reply, "Why sayest thou?" &c. We have three points before us—

I. ISAIAH'S DESPONDENCY.

It arose from a twofold source. 1. *The sense of a Divine desertion:* "My way is hidden from the Lord." Just because *the most earnest of the people* felt the absence of God from the nation, *he* felt it far more intensely. Many men have had the same experience. If we are Christians, we shall know it sooner or later. 2. *The absence of Divine recompense:* "My judgment is passed over from my God." A cry from the prophet himself. Remember how little result of his long labour the man of eighty years had seen.

The people were buried in God-forgetting repose; the priests were dead in formalism; the spiritual life of the land was decaying, and thunders of woe were muttering in the nation's future. All great men think that they die in failure. The same terrible absence of Divine recompense has been felt by lesser minds, if only earnest.

II. THE TRUTH THAT REMOVED IT.

In vers. 30, 31, we perceive that the double manifestation of God's greatness in Nature and the tenderness of His revealed will dispelled the gloom. 1. *The greatness of God in Nature* (vers. 28 and 26). (1.) Would not He who guided unweariedly the stars guide the life of immortal man unforgettingly and righteously? And thus the eternal chorus swept down on the prophet's soul from the heaven of heavens (ver. 27). Before the majestic care of the Creator in God's visible Bible of creation man's doubting heart should grow calm. (2.) He speaks not only of the unsearchable Creator, but of *the Everlasting God.* The Everlasting implies the thought of One to whom past, present, and future are one *now* (vers. 6–8). 2. *The tenderness of the revealed will* (vers. 11, 29). The revelation of God's tenderness *fuller* for the Christian man. We know how the Great Shepherd gave His life for the sheep.

III. THE RESULTS OF ITS REMOVAL.

They are twofold. 1. *Strength in weakness* (ver. 31). Feebleness is transformed into power when God has taught His great lesson of *glorying in infirmity.* 2. *Immortal youth.* "They shall mount up with wings as eagles." There is an old Jewish fable that the eagle in dying recovered its youthful power. This is what Isaiah meant. The trustful heart never grows old. The dying Christian starts into new vigour at the name of Christ. "The oldest angels are the youngest."—*E. L. Hull: Sermons,* First Series, pp. 81–90.

GOD'S POWER THE COMFORT OF HIS PEOPLE.

xl. 28. *Hast thou not known? &c.*

A softer tone one might think better adapted to the despondent; but this great interrogation seems as if the very thunder had taken in charge God's defence and man's elevation. The terms by which God is described are not what may be termed the gracious designations often employed to describe Him. It is not the Father, the Redeemer, the gentle One;

it is the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth; as if Divine comfort were not a sentiment only, but arose out of the majestic, dominant, mighty, and grand in the Divine nature.

1. "*Hast thou not known?*" This is not a new revelation; it is an appeal to memory—a strong point in all the Divine pleading. Our memory should be as the prophet of the Lord in our life; recollection should be inspiration. Let a man be faithful to his own recollections, and it is impossible he can long be despondent, weary, and slow of heart to lay hold of the great work and discipline of life. It is the preacher's strength that he has to speak directly into people's hearts.

II. *Is God all-mighty?* 1. Then do not fear for the stability of His works. What guarantee have we that the summer is coming? God's Word (Gen. viii. 22). We work because God *is*. This is very humbling in one of its aspects, because we have nothing to do with all that is highest and grandest in the creation. We are to do the servant's work; but no employment is menial if it be accepted from God's hand, and wrought out according to the measure of His commandment and the inspiration of His call.

2. Have no fear about the realisation of His promises. It is difficult to see how certain promises are to be realised. God keeps our hands off His promises quite as surely as He keeps them off His stars; He asks that their fulfilment be left to Him. It is God's *heart* that comes down with His signature; because of His *moral* attributes, all that He has promised shall be fulfilled.

3. Do not imagine you can escape His judgments. His lightnings find us out. You have evaded Him now fifty years, and you think you can do it fifty more; but *you cannot*. There are many oxen that are being prepared for the slaughter when they little think it.

4. Be assured that the throne of right shall stand upon the ruins of all wrong. You cannot kill evil with the sword; its abolition is a work of time: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness" (Ps. ii. 1–5). There is a poor outlook for those who are going to fight God!

III. God is not only powerful, but also *all-wise*. "There is no searching of His understanding." Infinite strength would terrify us, but infinite strength under the dominion of infinite mind recovers us from the shock which comes of immeasurable, unwasting strength. The forces of Nature are not lawless; behind them all is God's mind.

1. The darkest providences have meaning. Let us keep within our little sphere, and live a day at a time, and interpretation will come when God pleases and as He pleases.

2. God's plan of salvation is complete and final. We shall waste our strength and show how great is our folly by all attempts to improve the method of redemption and recovery of the world. Is there a blade of grass we can improve, looking at it as God made it? Then, why seek to improve His method of salvation?

3. Our individual life is all understood by Him. We are often in shadow; it is enough that God knows our life, and that His wisdom is pledged as our defence. View the mysteries of life atheistically, and they become terrors; but regard them as under the control of a beneficent Power, and an eye of glory opens in the very centre of the gloom.

4. We have a guarantee of endless variety in our future studies and services. God is ever extending our knowledge in reward of the endeavours we are making. Monotony depresses and enfeebles; He will ever have something new to communicate to the mind of His servants.

CONCLUSION.—1. What is our relation to this Dread Being, whose power is infinite, and whose wisdom is past finding out? We are either loyal subjects of His or rebels in His realm. Everything depends upon our relation

to the Cross of Jesus Christ. Nature itself is but a mocking mystery apart from the Cross, which reveals our *sin* and God's plan of salvation (John i. 29).

2. Those who are rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins have the freedom of the City of God. "What time I am afraid, I will trust in God." God waits to gather us into His infinite strength, and to make us wise with perfect understanding.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.: City Temple*, pp. 349–356.

The Unwearied God.

xl. 28. *The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.*

A great contrast between God and all His living creatures on this earth. They all need rest, but He has no need of it, for He is never weary. We shall find this declaration full of comfort; but before we consider the senses in which it is true, we shall do well to remember that we are plainly taught in His Word that there are certain things of which God is weary.

I. Things of which God is weary.

God is weary, 1. Of the obstinacy of sinners (ch. xliii. 24). 2. Of the backsliding of His professing people (Jer. xv. 6). 3. Of heedless praises and hypocritical prayers (ch. i. 11–14). 4. Of our cruelty to each other (Exod. iii. 7–10, xxii. 22; Isa. vii. 13).

II. Things of which God is not weary.

1. *He is not weary in continuing and preserving His creation.* The extent of this task; the multitude and minuteness of its parts. Neither its vastness, nor its complexity, nor its duration have availed to weary Him. We rest sometimes by changing the mode of our activity, but there is no cessation possible in God's work (H. E. I. 362–365, 3174–3176).

2. *He is not weary of caring for His people*, supplying their temporal wants, guiding their affairs, removing unknown hindrances out of their way, solacing them in sorrow, strengthening them against temptation, educating them for time and eternity (P. D. 2908).

3. *He is not weary of hearing prayer.* This is a special labour, additional to the work of preservation, and even to the care of His people. Remember the multitude of the prayers that are constantly ascending to Him. The folly of many of them! Yet still He listens to us!

4. *He is never weary in punishing sin;* never so weary as to desist from it. There are cases in which we leave incorrigible offenders alone—we will not trouble ourselves any more about them; but it is never so with God. Not because He loves punishment, but because He loves righteousness. To a tender heart it is always a pain to punish; yet God, whose tender mercies are over all His works, age after age requites all who do wickedly.

5. *He is never weary of pardoning penitent sinners.* How many He has pardoned! How often He had to pardon every one of those who are now "the spirits of the just made perfect!" How often we have tried His patience! Yet He still waits to be gracious; He does not say, "Here comes another sinner; drive him away!" nor, "Here comes that sinner again; refuse him access to my throne." He is as ready to pardon now as He was when Christ hung on the cross. He looks upon sins, not only as crimes, but as diseases; and, like a physician, is ready to minister to every plague-stricken one. Come, then, to Him *now* (H. E. I. 2285–2286, 2328–2339).

This view of God should—1. *Awaken our admiration of Him.* It is good to admire His works; better to admire Him (Ps. civ. 34). 2. *Strengthen our trust in Him.* Our human friends fail us, but God will never fail us (chap.

xxvi. 4, 5). 3. *Deepen our love for Him.* He is unwearable, not in strength merely, but in affection. His love outlasts that of many mothers (chap. xlix. 15, 16). 4. *Lead us to endeavour to imitate Him.* "Religion consists in imitation of God" (*Whichcote*). We should never grow weary of any work for Him which He permits us to do. (α)

(α) On Saturday, September 30, 1770, Whitfield preached his last sermon on this text: "*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*" Before he went out to do so, a friend, observing how ill he looked, said to him, "Sir, you are more fit to go to bed than to preach;" to which he answered, "True, sir;" but turning aside, he clasped his hands together, and looking up spoke:—"Lord Jesus, I am weary in Thy work, but not of Thy work. If I have not yet finished my course, let me go and speak for Thee once more in the fields, seal Thy truth, and come home and die."

Waiting on God.

xl. 31. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.*

I. Two conditions are necessary to physical life, viz., repose and activity. So, also, in the spiritual life, there are two conditions of health, viz., passivity and exercise. The former is expressed by *waiting*, which implies—1. *Passivity*—a state in which we are the recipients, in which we do nothing, but quietly expect something to be done. As men "wait for the morning," they wait for the salvation of God; for the fulfilment of His promises; for the coming of the Lord.

2. *Confidence in God*, an assurance that He will reveal Himself, that He will accomplish His Word.

3. *Desire and expectation.* Men who wait for the morning both expect it and long for it; so those who wait for God—for His salvation, for His coming—expect it and long for it (Ps. cxxx. 6).

4. *Patience* and *submission*—patience, because we know that the good waited for will not be granted before God's time; submission, because we know that it is in God's power to grant or to withhold, and that our only hope is in Him.

Waiting, therefore, is the opposite (1) Of indifference; (2) of despair; (3) of rebellious discontent. (See vol. i. pp. 178, 179, 332.)

II. Those who wait on the Lord renew their strength. 1. Because God flows in upon the soul, imparts larger measures of life; as occurs in sleep. As touching the ground, according to the fable. 2. Because God approves and blesses those who thus confide in Him and long for Him.

III. Times in which we should wait. 1. In seasons of devotion, private and public. 2. In times of sickness and sorrow. 3. In times of spiritual dearth. 4. All the time of our continuance in this world is a time of waiting for the salvation of God.—*C. Hodge, D.D.*

We have here some of the benefits of waiting upon God as they appeared to the fervid soul of the prophet Isaiah. True messenger of the old covenant, he continues to speak under the new. Let us listen to this old message, which is also new. What does the prophet say? He says:—

I. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." This sounds as if this godly life of theirs involved a considerable tax upon their spiritual strength; as if they were in danger of becoming "weary and faint in their minds." Is this really so, Christian tradesman, householder, citizen, preacher, worker in the Lord's vineyard? What do you say, you who suffer and you who are tempted? To all such this promise of Scripture will be very welcome. The least it can mean is—(1.) That *they shall stand their ground.* But it must mean something more than that they shall not retreat, though in such a warfare as ours no

to have yielded is itself a victory. It must mean, they shall advance, they shall make sure and steady progress against the foe. But the margin speaks of this renewal as a change of strength, as if it would remind us—(2.) Of *the many-sidedness of the grace of God*, and its perfect adaptability to our ever-changing needs. Whatever we need for the journey or the conflict, for prosperity or for adversity, prayer will obtain it for us (H. E. I. 2363–2374).

II. **"They shall mount up with wings as eagles."** This seems to say that the life of communion with God is not a long series of vapid and unemotional hours, a dead level of mechanical and spiritless employments, but a life that has rare and glorious experiences, holy aspirations, ennobling thoughts, ecstatic emotions, spirit-stirring hopes. "Wings as eagles." What does this mean? Climb where the eagle makes her nest and look. It means—

1. *Purer air.* Very pure is the atmosphere in which the eagle soars; she leaves all the fogs and mists of earth beneath her.

2. *Clearer vision.* The eagle sees things in their real relation to each other. What a mighty difference this often makes in our estimate of their nature! Premeditated insults below become mere forgetfulness above; irreparable injuries, mere scratches upon the skin; formidable duties, precious privileges.

3. *Untroubled quiet.* No one knows but he who has the secret of this Divine communion how deep a quiet God breathes about the heart that loves to speak with Him. In a peace that passeth understanding the praying spirit listens to the still small voice of God.

4. *Rare landscapes* greet his eye who mounts up with wings as eagles. We know what it is to look on Nature from the level. Can you fancy what it must be to look from eagle's wings? Can you fancy what it is to have beneath you the beauty of the earth from horizon to horizon? So is it with those that wait upon the Lord. Lifted up on faith's strong eagle pinions, over *the great world of God's written revelation*, what prospects they rejoice in! What order, beauty, harmony, and sublimity they descry! Or if these pinions raise him above *the world of human life*, it is still the same with him; he sees what none other sees—God overruling all things, causing all things to work together for good to them that love Him.

5. *Unclouded sunshine.* It is possible to get above the clouds (John xv. 11; 1 John iv. 18; Eph. iii. 19).

III. **"They shall run and not be weary."** Theirs shall be *capacity for the most strenuous exertion.*

IV. **"They shall walk and not faint."** Is not this the same as saying that we shall have the *power of steady perseverance, of patient endurance under protracted trials?* Did the prophet put this last because patience is one of those Christian graces that has its perfect work the latest—because the bearing of the Lord's burden is often a much more difficult thing than the doing of the Lord's work? And was it because he would encourage us by the assurance that that power, difficult as it is, shall yet be ours through prayer?

All this has but one lesson: BE MEN OF PRAYER.—*John H. Anderson: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. iii. pp. 84–87.

The Strength we Need.

xl. 31. *But they that wait upon the Lord, &c.*

Divine promises are made to character. The character here described is one who waits on his patron for a benefit, on his master for direction. It is the believer's expectant, obedient look. It probably here describes the attitude of the believing Jews in Babylon in expectation of deliverance.

For all action strength is required. It is more easy to describe than define. There is the strength of a fortress, of an army, of a labourer. There is in-

tellectual strength and moral strength. This last is required in the Christian life. There is an immense power of evil adverse to it, resistance to which requires moral strength. The text suggests the source whence it is derived, the constancy with which it is supplied, and the achievements by which it is distinguished.

I. THE SOURCE WHENCE IT IS DERIVED.

From the Lord on whom we wait. This is the point of connection between the text and what precedes. The prophet has contrasted the Divine power with the helplessness of heathen gods. He speaks of the power displayed in creation. When we contemplate its ample details, we conclude that power equal to their production is Omnipotence. The question is not affected by the fact that, while operating on matter, He is Himself immaterial. We do not understand the connection between mind and matter. But we know that mind operates on matter directly or indirectly. All science, all mechanical and engineering skill, is the indirect command of matter by mind. It can also command it directly. When the centurion came to Jesus pleading for the cure of his sick servant, it was not necessary for the Saviour to go to him (Matt. viii. 13). Who can explain the contact of the will of Jesus with this sick man at a distance from Him? Yet it was real and effectual. Thus with a word, the expression of mind and will, God at the creation "spake and it was done." It is illimitable, inexhaustible power (ver. 28).

Nor is it only the power that controls *matter*. Equally immeasurable is He in the region of *intellect*. Hence the prophet advances to this as the completion of his statement. "There is no searching of His understanding." We cannot understand the manner of the Divine thought. It is beyond us, as the thought of the mathematician is beyond the babe. But we know that it comprehends everything that exists, or will exist, or can.

And *moral* strength is His. He is holy; He is essential holiness. His will is the extremest removal from moral evil and accordance with righteousness. When He made man, He made him in His image; when He formulated laws for man's government, though fallen, they expressed His essential righteousness; and this is His demand, "Ye shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy."

And this is the source of human strength. Will any man say that his physical strength is self-created and independent? Or that his intellectual strength is independent of God? He who gave it sometimes takes it away. Our moral strength comes from Him. For what is it? Is it not the inclination of the will to the good, the righteous, the holy? Is this the natural disposition of man's will? Was it not lost in the Fall? Is not human nature proverbially weak in resistance of evil? How can it be made strong? "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." He not only pardons the past by the power of the atoning sacrifice; He provides by His Spirit a change of heart for the sinner. This regenerating power is the beginning and centre of the soul's strength.

II. THE CONSTANCY WITH WHICH IT IS SUPPLIED.

The body becomes weary by exertion. The over-wrought brain becomes incapable of effort. Both must be recruited by rest and suitable aliment. And the soul's strength gives way under the pressure of evil unless it is constantly replenished from the Eternal source. The difference between such as are permanently strong and such as are weak is the difference between such as rely on their own sufficiency and such as wait on the Lord. Youth is the time when self-confidence is greatest. But if the young Christian becomes confident in the self-perpetuating power of that determination of his will that has been given by the grace of God, he will be in danger of spiritual exhaustion and consequent powerlessness. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and

the young men shall utterly fall." Strength is maintained by constant inflowing from God. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." There may be an allusion to the supposed renewal of the eagle's strength. Very impressive is the contrast between Nature when exhausted and weary in winter, and the spring-time, when reinvigorated from secret sources and her strength put forth anew. Pleasant to the toiler, weary in mind and body with his work; is the quiet evening with his family, the night's sleep, the Sabbath change and rest. Sweet is returning strength when the crisis of disease has passed, and the power which illness has exhausted is felt again. Thus spiritual forces are liable to waste. They need repair. Bring them to the source of strength. Use the means of grace. Seek the Spirit's help. "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." How blessed the experience of Paul (2 Cor. iv. 16).

III. THE ACHIEVEMENTS BY WHICH IT IS DISTINGUISHED.

"They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Weakness seeks ease; strength seeks action. It is described—1. *As elevation.* Like the eagle, whose flight is upward toward the sun. Nearer in thought and feeling to God. 2. *As progression.* In the path of Christian experience, character, service. It becomes easier from habit, as the daily task. And new strength is supplied.

The practical lesson of the whole is, that to fallen men God is this true source of moral strength. "My strength is made perfect in weakness." —*J. Rawlinson.*

RENEWING STRENGTH.

xl. 31. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.*

Human strength is of many kinds—physical, mental, spiritual; but every form of human strength must of necessity spend itself; for the world of which it forms a part decays, and by and by, like a worn-out vesture, the heavens and the earth shall be rolled up and put away. All strength apart from God is derived strength, and is consequently measurable, and must come to an end. The river runs on and the brook fails not, because they come from fountains that are not affected by drought; but cisterns are dried and reservoirs fail, because they have no springing well at the bottom of them; and if the pipes which supply them cease to flow, they are soon left dry as a threshing-floor. Let every man know, therefore, that whatever his strength may be, of body, mind, or spirit, if it be his own, it will fail him one day. Mingled with all things human there are portions of that all-dissolving acid which fell upon man's nature when Infinite Justice said, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

On the other hand, Divine strength never fails. It seems almost a superfluity to say as much as that: it abides in joyous fulness, never in the least diminished. The Lord was God when as yet this sun, and moon, and all these stars slept in His thought like unborn forests in an acorn cup; and He will be God when all this brief creation shall melt back to nothing, as a moment's foam dissolves into the wave that bore it and is lost for aye. God changes not; the fountain of His almightiness still overflows. You may bring your boundless wants and have them all supplied, but you shall no more diminish His all-sufficiency than when an infant dips his cup into the sea and leaves the sea brimming over upon ten thousand leagues of shore.

What then? These two things seem very far away—man with his faintness, his strength gradually drying up: God with His eternity and

inexhaustible omnipotence. If we can bring these two together, if by an act of faith you that are human can be linked with the Divine, what a wondrous thing will happen! Then the sacred words of the text will be fulfilled.

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." When the heart drinks life from the heart of God, and man is at one with his Maker, then all is well.

"From God, the overflowing spring,
Our souls shall drink a fresh supply;
While those who trust their native strength
Shall melt away and droop and die."

I. WE SEE HOW A TRUE CHURCH MAY BE DESCRIBED. "They that wait upon the Lord."

1. A Church such as a Church ought to be consists of men who *depend upon the Lord alone;* for waiting signifies dependence. Their hope is in God. They rest in God's righteousness as their righteousness, and they receive the great sacrifice provided by God to be their atonement and their acceptance. No man is really a Christian who finds his hope and confidence within himself; he must be looking out of himself to God in Christ Jesus. If Christians are what they ought to be, they depend upon God alone in their Church capacity. (1.) God's Word is their only creed: they do not add to it anything whatever—no, not a sentence, a gloss, or a thought. A true Church of God will say, "We wait upon the Lord for teaching: this Word of the Lord is to us our infallible source of doctrine, and that alone." Those who wait upon the Lord for their creed shall never need to give up their faith for something better, but they shall renew their strength. (2.) A true Church waits upon the Lord for grace, and has faith in the doctrines of grace as the testimony with which it is to work. It says to the pastor, "Teach you what God has taught. Preach Christ crucified. Preach not your own thoughts, nor notions of your own inventing, but what is revealed of God—preach you that, for it shall be the power of God unto salvation." If the bare unaltered truth of God will not break a man's heart, then it certainly will not break it when it is rounded and toned down and made to look pretty so as to suit the prevailing taste. A Church that waits upon the Lord uses only the doctrine of Scripture as its battle-axe and weapons of war. (3.) A Church that is waiting upon the Lord always knows where its strength lies, namely, in its God. What is the power with which men are to be converted? Eloquence, say some. The Church of God says, "Not so. Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord." I solemnly believe that so much of human oratory as there is in a sermon, so much there is of the weakness of the flesh; for all the power must be of God working with the truth through the Holy Ghost. Therefore we should use great plainness of speech, and never speak for the sake of the language, but always for the sake of the truth we have to say, that God may bless it to the hearts of men. No man in this world was ever converted except by the Holy Spirit, and never will any man be truly converted by any other power. The Gospel has salvation in it when the Holy Spirit works by it, but no other doctrine can save. Many in these days think that we want a great deal besides the Spirit of God, but they are in error. They think that the world is not to be converted and men saved in the old-fashioned way of preaching the Word of God with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; but it is to be converted in that way and no other. You cannot touch a dead heart to make it alive either by excitement or by philosophy. Spiritual life can only come in God's way, and it is God's way by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. God's Word will not return unto Him void; but man's word is void when it goes forth, and void it remains to the end of the chapter. The magicians and their enchantments cannot compare with the rod of Moses. We mean, whatever

others do, to keep to "waiting upon the Lord," going to work in the Lord's way, and depending upon the Lord's power, and upon that alone.

2. If we depend upon God, *our expectation is from Him.* We wait upon God as the birds in the nest wait upon the parent bird, expecting from her their food. Before she comes you hear their cries, and when she comes, if you look into the nest, you will see nothing but so many gaping mouths, all waiting, expecting to be filled by the mother-bird. That is just what a Church of God ought to be—a company of wide-opened mouths waiting to be filled by the Lord alone. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it," says the Lord. Do you not think that some Churches, and some Christians, have scarcely learned to open their mouths at all? Let us expect more of God, and we shall receive more. Is He not able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think? Expecting people, a flourishing Church. They are believers in the power of the Gospel, and they act accordingly. When I fire the gun, they are on the alert to pick up the birds, for they believe in the killing power of the Word. If a Church would but wait upon God in this sense of expecting great things from Him, it should have them; for He will never allow His people to complain that He has been a wilderness to them.

3. To make up waiting there is a third thing, and that is *patience*—to hold out and wait the Lord's time and will. This patience is to the uttermost desirable, that we may endure affliction, persevere in holiness, continue in hope, and abide in our integrity. Patience is the long life of virtue, and sets on its head the crown of experience. It is no child's play to continue to suffer affliction with joyfulness, and to remain for years perfectly acquiescent in the will of the Lord, let that will be what it may. That little word WAIT is a word fit for a father in Christ, and cometh not out of the mouth of a babe in grace. Some are ardent followers of Christ, but they do not seem to have learned the meaning of that word "patience." They are working for Christ, and they are depending upon the Lord, and they are looking for results; but when they do not see them immediately, they are offended and depressed. You were much the same when you were children: you wanted everything there and then, and waiting was dismal work to you. It is the mark of the child that he is in a violent hurry where men are steady. The Lord sometimes sends us speedy results to our labours; but at other times it is not so—the truth works slowly and surely, and effects all the more precious results. We must wait for seed to grow and for fruit to ripen. If we really wait upon the Lord, we shall just keep on, resolved to abide in duty, determined to remain in prayer, undaunted in confidence, unmoved in expectation. We shall not fly into a passion with the Lord and refuse to believe Him any more, neither shall we run off to novelties and fall into the fads and crazes of the day. The Lord will not fail the soul that waits upon Him; all will be well; the blessing will come. What a sweet thing is the calm leisure of faith! "He that believeth shall not make haste." Fret and worry, hurry and haste, are all slain by the hand of faith.

II. WE SEE WHAT THE LORD'S WAITING PEOPLE NEED. They need to *renew their strength.*

1. *Because they are human.* As the world is full of changes, so are we (α). Creatures whose home is on the earth cannot always live upon the wing: they must feel faint at times; and hence the necessity of this blessed promise, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

2. *Because they are imperfect.* Our natural corruption and the imperfection and infirmity of our flesh are about us still, and these bring us down at times till we say with David, "I am this day weak, though anointed king." Because we are human and imperfect, we cannot always be at our best: the sky is not always clear; the sea is not always at flood; the year is not always at summer; the summer is not always

in the zenith; the moon is not always at her full; the tree is not always adorned with fruit; the vineyard does not always flow with wine; roses do not always blush, nor lilies always bloom. Creatures have their rises and their falls, and to us also there must be times when we need to renew our strength. It must be renewed, for otherwise *it will decline still further*, and this would be painful, dangerous, and dishonouring. The Lord would not have us utterly fail, nor fall prone upon the ground in the heavenly race; therefore to those who have no might He increaseth strength.

3. We must renew our strength, for *it is for our honour, comfort, and safety.*

4. *It is for God's glory and for own own usefulness* that we should be strong; and if we fall into decline and weakness, pray do not let us stop there. A pining sickness is an awful disease for a Church to die of. Do not linger in such a state. Up with you, and cry mightily unto the Lord, and you shall yet be restored.

III. HOW ARE WE TO RENEW OUR STRENGTH? If we are God's people, we must renew our strength *by continually waiting upon God.* (β)

If a Church wants reviving, if saints individually want reviving, they must wait upon God—1. *In prayer.* Oh, what a blessing a day's prayer might be! If you cannot get as much as that, how much renewing may be gained in an hour's prayer! 2. Add to that a *re-dedication* of ourselves to the Lord who bought us. This often helps us to renew our strength. 3. Then afresh realise your *entire dependence* upon God. Put yourself into the Lord's hands absolutely. Be like the sere leaf that is carried by the breath of the tempest. 4. Then go forward to *renewed action.* In renewing your strength, ask the Lord that you may undertake fresh work, and that this work may be done to a nobler tune—that you may have more expectancy, more confidence, more faith, more God-reliance. What things are done by men in common life with *self*-reliance! But with *God*-reliance we work impossibilities, and miracles fly from us like sparks from the anvil of a smith. When a man learns to work with God's strength, and with that alone, he can do all things.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1756.

(α) Some friends never seem to be either high or low in their feelings: their life has neither hills nor valleys in it, but is comparable to an unbroken plain: they traverse a perpetual level. It is not so with others of us: we are all Alps and Andes. These favoured pilgrims march steadily and evenly through the world, always at one pitch and pace; but others of us who mount up into the heavens in burning zeal and holy joy, go low, very low down, into the depths, till our soul sinketh because of sorrow. The best and bravest of the saints are poor creatures. Elijah on the top of Carmel, when he has brought fire from heaven, cries, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape!" Hear him as he pleads with God and unlocks the treasury of the rain. See him gird up his loins and run before the chariot of Ahab. There is a man for you! If ever hero-worship might be tolerated, it is in the case of "this my lord Elijah." Look not too closely at the champion, for within twenty-four hours he is afraid of Jezebel, and soon he is whining, "O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." Do you blame him? Do you fail to understand so sad a stoop from so great a height? Take heed of censuring a man so greatly approved of God as to be spared the pains of death. If you do as well as Elijah did, perhaps you may hear some nobodies blaming you in your hour of exhaustion; but as for me, I cannot censure him, nor can any man that has ever enjoyed the heavenly delirium of high-strung zeal in the Master's service, and having been borne aloft on eagle's wings, at last falls upon the earth in absolute exhaustion. After nigh excitement there will come reaction.—*Spurgeon.*

(β) When a man wants his bodily strength renewed, his purpose may be effected by eating a good meal. He has grown empty through hunger, and there is nothing in him; he must be filled up with substantial nourishment, and then the human engine will generate fresh force. Oh, ye who are weak in spirit, come and feed upon Christ!

Sometimes a man may renew his strength by taking a little rest. He has grown weak through stern labour and long fatigue, and he must be quiet and repose till he recovers. Oh, ye weary, heavy-laden, where is there rest for you except in the Christ of God?

We have known men's strength renewed by breathing their native air. They have risen out of a hot and fœtid atmosphere into the cool breeze of the mountain-side, and the bracing breeze has made them strong again. Oh, to have the breath of the Spirit blowing upon us once again!—*Spurgeon.*

Renewing Strength.

xl. 31. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, &c.*

As it is the same God who works in nature and in grace, a most interesting analogy may be traced between His operations in both. When the earth is parched with the heat of summer, and its productions begin to languish from excessive drought, it is watered and refreshed by the showers of heaven, and its various plants and fruits not only resume their former health and vigour, but spring up and flourish with greater luxuriance and vigour. The flower, too, that had drooped and withered at the close of day, is revived by the cool and the dews of night, and in the morning puts forth its buds and expands its leaves anew, delighting the eye with the beauty of its colours, or perfuming the air with the sweets of its fragrance. For every degree of exhaustion in nature, the wisest and most adequate provision is made by its all-pervading and beneficent Author. In like manner, when the spiritual strength of the Christian is impaired, from whatever cause, if only he wait upon God, his decays of strength are recruited from above; new fountains are opened for his comfort; he rises up from the ground, on which he was sitting in feebleness and sorrow, and no longer with faltering, but with firm and steady steps, pursues the course of active duty or of patient suffering in which he is appointed to move. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Observe—

I. To whom this comprehensive and animating declaration is made. "They that wait upon the Lord," *i.e.*, those who (1) earnestly desire the enjoyment of His favour; and (2) diligently attend to, and take peculiar delight in, all His service and will.

II. The import of the declaration. It implies—1. *That the principles of the spiritual life within them shall be gradually strengthened and increased.* These principles are faith and love—faith in the Son of God, through whom, as the propitiation for sin and the beloved of the Father, they are justified and accepted and saved; and love to Him as having redeemed them unto God by His precious blood, and given them the first-fruits of His Spirit, that they may live to His praise and be heirs of His glory. These principles are strengthened by the very act of waiting upon God, for thus our knowledge of Him is increased. And the more we know of Him, the more our faith in Him and love towards Him will strengthen.

2. *That increased communications of Divine grace shall be made to them.*

III. The effects of its fulfilment.

1. *The devotions of those who wait upon God become more elevated and intense.* "They shall mount up with wings as eagles." (α)

2. *They acquire greater alacrity and perseverance in doing His will.* "They shall run," or march on, "and not be weary." Here the metaphor is varied, and changed into one that is more common in the sacred writings, as expressive of Christian duty, which is frequently compared to running or marching (Ps. cxix. 32, &c.) To those whose spiritual strength is renewed by waiting on the Lord, duty is not a task, but a delight. They are never so happy as when labouring in the sphere of service allotted them; and under the burdens which sometimes press upon them they are supported and cheered by the promises and grace of Him whom they serve.

3. *They are enabled to manifest fortitude and patience under affliction.* "They shall walk and not faint." Here the metaphor is again beautifully varied, or rather another shade of the same image is presented for the encouragement of every traveller to the Heavenly Zion. Even when incapable, as it

were, of increasing their strength or of being active in the service of God, grace is both promised and imparted for enabling them to move forward without fainting in the path of submission and suffering (Ps. xxiii. 4; H. E. I. 198–202).—*David Dickson, D.D.: Discourses*, pp. 198–222.

(α) At first, or when weakened by the influence of unbelief and corruption, the motion of the believer's soul towards God and spiritual objects is but feeble and inconstant, like the flutterings of a new-fledged bird, stretching its wings and attempting to fly, but, from want of habit or of strength, attempting it with little success. But when, in waiting on the Lord, their faith and love become more vigorous and steady, and the circumstances that rendered them languid and fluctuating are removed, like the eagle, which, after its feathers are renewed, mounts from its rocky nest stronger and livelier and more beauteous than before, and with expanded wings soars above the lower regions of the air, as towards the orb of the sun itself—they rise above the influence of the world and its vanities; and as their heart ascends in devout aspiration to the God of mercy and grace, they approach more nearly to the full radiance of the Sun of Righteousness, and rest their desires and affections more intensely on Him, as the brightness of the Divine glory, and the source of ineffable light and bliss. They are not only visited with peace and joy in believing, but are almost, like Paul, raised as to the third heaven, and see and hear things that are unutterable and full of glory.

Such elevated enjoyment is not indeed vouchsafed to every believer. Nay, there are many who perhaps never reach it on this side the grave. But their devotions do in every case become more exalted and habitual as they go on in their course in the strength of the Lord. Perhaps their mental constitution is incapable of such intenseness of meditation and of feeling; or it is not necessary for the particular duties and service assigned them; or their natural temperament is so melancholy and desponding, that were they to be indulged with such high manifestations, their depression might become deeper after these manifestations were over, and the fearful suspicion that they were altogether delusive might sink them in greater distress than before. But one thing is certain, that by all who truly wait upon the Lord progress will be and is made, both in the strength and the countenance of devotional habits, of spiritual affection, and of heavenly-mindedness; and that the grace which they ask in prayer and receive by faith gradually raises them to a far higher state of Christian attainment than that by which the beginning of their spiritual life was marked. Of the degree of this advancement they may not, indeed, be always conscious, for their humility will increase in exact proportion to their other real attainments.—*Dickson.*

Soul Growth.

xl. 31. *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, &c.*

Men develop under a universal law of variableness. We do nothing continuously except breathe and pulsate. It is insanity to think upon one subject continuously. Health demands intermission, even retrocession. This truth may be seen in a larger way in our pursuits and actions. We pursue pleasure, engage in business, seek sociality intermittently (H. E. I. 2064–2066, 2073–2074).

Deep moral and religious thought and feeling are produced by a thousand concurrent influences. All endeavours to hold Christians, Churches, or individuals to a high emotive condition of religious feeling are vain. Virtue, morality, duties are perpetuated; but, in regard to these, *we* are changing. When reactions and backslidings take place, how shall men renew? How shall the words of the prophet be fulfilled? The method by which spiritual strength may be renewed and augmented must be learned from a study of the providence of God. We ought to take the Bible as men take charts. Human life is the interpreter of the Word of God (H. E. I. 549, 550, 560).

What, then, are some of the methods by which men, in the Divine economy, advance in spiritual impulse and rise permanently higher? (α)

1. We must not be biassed by any theory of Church or ordinances, nor by any preaching, to suppose that we are shut up to the dealings of God with us through these channels. The Church occupies a foremost place here; but

the schools, books, newspapers, business, social influences work upon the human soul.

2. It pleases God to make the spiritual development of men depend on *time-growth*. The body is the first to develop, then the social affections, with the elementary forms of the intellect, then the moral elements, and last the spiritual nature. Many persons develop high religious emotions prematurely. Many may lose by neglect or by delay; but there is an element of time which must be taken into consideration.

3. Spiritual strength is renewed through *the removal of false or imperfect views of truth*. There is a relation between a man's reason and things that are reasonable. The *preaching* of the Divine nature is, sometimes, not made drawing to men. It is not altogether human depravity that is at fault. Spiritual growth ought to be more to us than any orthodoxy or regularity of outward forms. Change of circumstances may give the needful impetus to soul-growth.

4. Many persons fail to come to the inspiration of the higher views of religion *by reason of worldly prosperity, which tends to satisfy their lower nature* (H. E. I. 3998–4014). In these circumstances, distresses, infirmities, and even great sorrows, are blessed of God to the opening of their nature and to the renewing of their spiritual strength. Troubles are well-diggers. We are rich and strong, not by the things which we possess, but by the amount of true manhood developed in us (H. E. I. 129, 130, 204–212).

5. It pleases God also to employ the *companionship of friends and neighbours* in developing their higher manhood. There is nothing so helpful to a soul as the contact of another soul. How much was there in Christ's personal touch! Go about *as a man* among men (H. E. I. 1049, 1050).

6. When, by the use of these various instrumentalities, our souls have grown and come into the possibility of a higher spiritual disclosure, then there is *a further soul-growth in us*. We come to a state in which there is a direct influence of the soul of God exerted upon us—as direct as sight and voice to the bodily senses. Men may come, at last, into that state in which the Spirit of God shines with a steadfast lustre upon them (H. E. I. 974, 2840, 2900). Then there is the triumph of grace in the soul. Then intuitions become truths. What wonder that the dying saint should catch the sound of heavenly music!

CONCLUSION.—It is the privilege of all Christians to live this life, not to-day nor to-morrow, but as the result of patient continuance in well-doing, growing in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. —*Henry Ward Beecher: Christian Age*, vol. vii. pp. 102–106.

(a) See H. E. I. 2473–2569.

THE EAGLE-WINGED BELIEVER.

xl. 31. *They shall mount up with wings as eagles.*

Scripture is full of parables, in which spiritual things are represented by natural. Here the believer's progress is compared to the eagle's flight.

I. THE WINGS WHEREWITH HE MOUNTS UP.

There are especially these two, the wing of faith and the wing of love. 1. The wing of *faith*. None can mount up to heaven without it, for it is a grace that looks not at the things seen in this world, but at the things that are not seen; and it mounts the soul to heaven and heavenly things (H. E. I. 1902–1907; P. D. 1164). 2. The wing of *love*. This grace, like faith, unites the soul to Christ. This is such a strong wing that fire cannot burn it; marytrs have found that the fire did not burn their love; no, it mounted up to heaven with the flame (H. E. I. 3337, 3338).

II. THE THINGS WHEREIN HE MOUNTS UP.

1. Not in airy speculations. Some have a great deal of head-knowledge, but no heart-love of the truth (2 Thess. ii. 10, 11). There may be much speculative knowledge where there is no saving grace (H. E. I. 3091). 2. Not in sinful curiosity, to pry into the secrets of God (Deut. xxxix. 29). Many fall into this error in regard to the decrees of election and reprobation, the day of judgment (Matt. xxv. 13), heaven (H. E. I. 1508–1518, 1793–1802, 2718). 3. Not in self-conceit and self-estimation, as some do who mount up in the pride of their hearts (James iv. 6). 4. Not in fits and starts of devotion. Many who hear the Word seem to be mounted up in joy; but it is but a flash, and like a land-flood (Luke viii. 6, 13).

They mount up—1. In holy meditation (Ps. civ. 34; Rom. viii. 5). They do not allow their thoughts to wander on the mountains of vanity (H. E. I. 3499–3504). 2. In holy desires (Isa. xxvi. 9). 3. In heavenly affections (Col. iii. 2). 4. In lofty designs. Their ultimate design is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever. 5. In righteous practices. This is seen in all their actions. The world's standard is not theirs (1 Cor. x. 31).

III. HOW THE BELIEVER MOUNTS UP.

Like the eagle—1. *Naturally.* The eagle mounts not at man's command, but by the instinct God has given it (Job xxxix. 27). To the believer a new heart has been given, and it is natural to him to be mounting towards God. When the hypocrite mounts up, he is forced up contrary to his natural tendency, like a stone cast up into the air (H. E. I. 3008). 2. *Highly.* The eagle flies higher than other birds, and makes her nest on high; unlike the ostrich, that leaves her eggs in the sand. 3. *Gradually.* Though the eagle's flight is strong and swift, it is gradual. So the believer mounts up, by degrees (Ps. lxxxiv. 7). He rises to more and more knowledge of God and more and more communion with Him, until faith and hope land in vision and fruition. 4. *Frequently.* The carnal professor mounts up only about the time of a communion, or when in some sore affliction, or during a revival, and whenever these seasons are over, he goes down as fast as he went up; but the believer mounts on week-days as well as on Sabbath-days, on ordinary Sabbaths as well as on communion Sabbaths.

IV. WHY THE BELIEVER MOUNTS UP.

1. Because it is as natural for him to do so as it is for an eagle. He hath a new nature, which ascends to heaven whence it descended (2 Cor. v. 17; H. E. I. 1103). 2. Because he hath his nest on high; like an eagle, his *all* is above. Christ is all in all to him, and therefore rise he must.

APPLICATION.—1. *A word of terror to you that never mounted up towards Christ.* What shall we say to you? You are not like eagles, but like ravens, that do not mount heavenwards, but wander to and fro upon the earth, as Noah's raven did, and feed upon sordid things. You cannot fly to heaven, but flutter upon earth; and while you continue what you are, heaven you will never reach.

2. *A word of comfort to the mounting soul.* As the mounting soul is blessed, so is he safe as long as he is mounting; he is out of the reach of this world's misery; safe against death itself. The eagle is never in danger but when she is on earth; we are never in danger when we are in Christ till we fly down to the earth. Therefore, seeing God hath renewed your strength to mount up as on eagle's wings, O soar aloft; look down with a generous disdain upon the world and the vanities thereof, and keep your heart up in heaven. Mount, mount, mount; be always mounting, till you come to the throne of God and the Lamb.—*Ralph Erskine, M.A., Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 495–519.

He makes a very great mistake who supposes that the word "wait" implies

an indolent passivity. The Hebrew word has brawn and bone in it; its signification is primarily *to be strong*—strong enough to hold out under pressure. Thence the word came to signify patience, as the opposite of discouragement and peevishness. When a soul is ready to do God's will, and to submit cheerfully to God's discipline, and to receive such fulness of supply as God is willing to bestow, that soul may be truly said to "wait on the Lord." It is a great grace, and it leads to a great glory.

The man who thus waits on God renews his strength. He does more; he receives a wonderful *inspiration*. He "shall mount up with wings as an eagle." Naturalists tell us that the special power of the eagle is in his wings. He can fly in the teeth of a gale, and go out on long voyagings towards the clouds, and play the aeronaut for hours without weariness. The sparrow twitters from the house-top; the dove is content to abide in the forest; but eagles are children of the skies and playmates of the storm. Even their nests are on the mountain crags.

So God means that every soul which waits on Him shall sometimes soar. Not creep or grovel in worldliness, or crouch in bondage to man or devils, but rise above all these baser things into the atmosphere of heaven. When a soul binds itself to God, it finds wings. Such an one has a citizenship in the skies. He catches inspiration from the indwelling Spirit. He rises above the chilling fogs of doubt, gains a wide outlook, is filled with ennobling thoughts, and actually feels that he is an heir to a celestial inheritance. He *outflies* the petty vexations that worry the worldling, and the grovelling lusts that drag the selfish and sensual soul down into the mire. His soul-life is hid with Christ in God. What cares the eagle, as he bathes his wing in the translucent gold of the sunbeam, for all the turmoil, the smoke, the clouds, or even the lightnings that play far beneath him? He flies in company with the unclouded sun. So a heaven-bound soul, filled with the joys of the Holy Spirit, flies in company with God.

You may realise these happy experiences if you will but wait on Him. You will be surprised to find what an uplift there is in your religion. You will discover how it can carry you above base and sensual desires; how it can give birth to pure and holy meditations; how it can kindle joy in seasons of dark adversities and bereavements; how it can keep your hope as serene and shining as the morning star. Strive after this, by living less on self and more on Jesus. Live more like a son of God or a daughter of God, with the full feeling of adoption. Set your affections on things above. Don't count these perishable things to be your treasures. Seek better ones in heaven. So shall prayer and Bible study, and the daily victory over sin, and the doing of God's will, renew your strength. You will mount up with wings as eagles, until you grow heavenly-minded—"which is life and peace." This is the "higher life" to which Christ calls every believer. And when you and I are inclined to nestle down in indolence and self-indulgence, God "stirs up our nests" and bids us fly towards Him. — *Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D.*

The Unwearied Runner.

(*A Sermon to Young Men.*)

xl. 31. *But they that wait upon the Lord . . . shall run and not be weary.*

Running is the young man's pace. With overflowing strength and buoyant spirits, the danger is not that young men should not run, but that they should run amiss, or that they should attempt to run in the right road in

their own strength. The text describes a character as well as gives a promise.

I. THE RUNNING.

There are different paces among the Lord's servants. Ahimaaz is swifter than Cushi; John outruns Peter. 1. *Running is the pace of energy.* The puff-ball is the emblem of many a forceless life. Others work with both hands. If the Lord's work is worth doing, it is worth doing well. Be it ours to outstrip the energy of this world. 2. *Running indicates fulness of alacrity* (Gen. xviii. 7, xxiv. 46; 1 Sam. iii. 4, 5). Note how often Mark uses about Christ the words "straightway" and "immediately." Every man should be as David with Goliath, eager for the fray; as Elisha, who left the oxen and ran after Elijah; as Philip, who ran to meet the chariot of the Ethiopian. 3. *To run is to be diligent.* That is hardly running in which a man starts and stops, and starts and stops again. Much of Sunday-school teaching is a very slovenly make-believe. Patient continuance in well-doing is crowned. 4. *Running indicates thoroughgoing hearty zeal. E.g.*, Aaron running for his censer, and running in between the living and the dead, that the plague might be stayed (Num. xvi. 46–50). Christ is dishonoured by our heartlessness, the Gospel is derided through our indifference, and souls are lost by our sloth. From all this it is clear that the *runner* is one whose spiritual life is *intense.* Young men should be runners.

II. COMMEND THE RUNNING.

1. *Because it is a warming pace.* Running is better than standing before a fire for warming one; active exertions are better for the Christian life than listening to sermons. Let spiritual dyspeptics turn their hands to work. 2. *A ground-clearing pace.* Creepers meet with more obstacles than runners. 3. *A cheering pace.* Runners have no time to become dispirited. David ran to fight Goliath. One can understand the Balaclava *charge.* 4. *The winning pace* (1 Cor. ix. 24). All our God-given strength must be put out to win. 5. *A fitting pace for a believer.* Jesus Christ declares that we should run for Him. Christians who fall in love with "life in earnest" become far happier men. This is to live in the light of God's countenance, like Milton's angel in the midst of the sun.

III. THE RUNNER'S GIRDLE.

"They that wait upon the Lord shall run and not be weary." Waiting upon the Lord is essential to the running. *They* shall not be weary. Much running is short-lived. Many converts are converted back again. Not every bloom becomes a fruit. To wait upon the Lord is—1. *To yield yourselves, by God's grace, to be His servant.* Every hair of our head belongs to our Saviour. Consecration is needed to keep up the running so as to win the crown. 2. *To go to Him for all your strength.* Man's natural strength is perfect weakness as to spiritual things; strong points left undefended lead to ruin. Dare to do great work for God, and you will be enabled to dare ever greater things. 3. *To cultivate the expectancy of hope.* Wait at the foot of Jacob's ladder for the angels to bring down answers to prayer. (See Outlines, WAITING FOR THE LORD, vol. i. pp. 178, 179, 332, 333.)

IV. THE RUNNER'S STAFF.

"He shall not be weary." Some are not weary of God's work, though they often grow weary in it. To stand, and having done all, to stand, is impossible to flesh and blood; it is only possible to the God-sustained. How run, then? Running Christians have daily strength for daily needs; they find fresh matter of interest (if you want a novel, read your Bible); they look to the end, to the recompense of the reward (1 Cor. xv. 58).

CONCLUSION.—Let runners beware of slackening their pace.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (1869), pp. 337–348.

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY RUNNING. To run, in a spiritual acceptation, is to engage with great liveliness and zeal in the duties which God has appointed, and to persist in them with all our powers. Running includes—

1. *Forwardness*, in opposition to culpable delays. When a good work is proposed to some, they catch at any excuse for neglecting it; or, if they do set about it, it is with so much reluctance and indolence, that what little is done is of little worth. But the lively Christian, let God call him when He will, is eager to discharge whatever appears to be his duty (Ps. cxix. 60). The angels are represented as standing round about the throne of God, hearkening to the voice of His word; as it were, watching every motion of His lips: and the instant they perceive the least intimation of His pleasure, they fly to execute it. Those who are truly God's people do His will on earth as it is done in heaven: they do it promptly. Examples (1 Kings xix. 20; Matt. iv. 22, ix. 9; H. E. I. 3633–3638).

2. *Perseverance and diligence.* It is not every progressive motion that can be called running. The motion used in it is quick and animated, and that not for a step or two, but for a considerable way, even to the end of the course. It implies, therefore, not merely a forwardness in the setting about a good design, but diligence in prosecuting it, and perseverance to finish it. Our endeavours to please God and win the glorious prize must be strenuous, ardent, continuous. When a person is running for a considerable wager, he doth not loiter, nor enter into trifling conversation with every one he meets. No; he looks at nothing but the prize set before him; he will not suffer himself to be hindered by any one; he pushes on with unremitted ardour to the end of the race (1 Cor. ix. 25; Phil. iii. 13).

II. HOW FAR THEY WHO RUN MAY EXPECT TO BE SUPPORTED.

1. *They shall never be so weary as to lose their inward delight in religion.* Though the flesh sometimes flags and tires, and the present lively feeling of joy and comfort diminishes, the willingness of the spirit still continues; the principle of delighting in God doth not expire; their love to Christ and their eagerness to serve Him are as strong as ever. They are quite vexed and impatient when they find that nature cannot keep up with grace.

2. *They shall not be so weary as to throw off the practice of religion.* They may forget themselves, as Peter did in the high priest's hall, and speak and act very inconsistently with their professed devotion to Christ; but yet, if they be really born again, grace will recover them from this temporary fainting; a look from Christ will set all right again.

III. WHAT REASON THEY HAVE TO EXPECT SUPPORT.

1. *They have the power and promise of God to depend upon* (chap. xli. 10, xl. 27-29; Ps. lxiii. 8).

2. *There is a boundless excellency in religion, calculated to afford continual refreshment.* Whatever else men apply their minds and hearts to, they are soon tired of; they find an emptiness in it which makes them throw it aside with disgust (Eccles. vii. 6; 1 John ii. 16; H. E. I. 4969–4974). But ask one who lives in communion with God, and runs the way of God's commands with an enlarged heart, whether he is weary of it and would rather be excused from it, and you know what his vehement and indignant answer will be (John iv. 34; Ps. lxxxiv. 10). The toils and labours of religion have one advantage above all other pursuits—there is no climbing to the top; there is no sounding the bottom; there is no finding out the breadth or length of its excellency and sweetness.

3. *The faster we run the nearer we approach to heaven.* We all know that they who are running in a race feel new vigour when they come within sight of the goal, especially the first of the competitors. With what a spring doth he advance, in his last steps, to lay hold on the prize! It is the same in the Christian race; the near approach of salvation drives off lazy slumbers, and sets all the powers of the soul in animated motion. (*a*)

APPLICATION.—Let those who are running the race set before them be encouraged. You are in the way of mercy, and may expect not only to be

kept from falling, but to have a continual increase of grace. Let the way be never so long, the ascent never so difficult, the opposition never so great, and your strength never so small; what are all these to the power and promise of God? Only—1. *Take care that you begin well.* Be sure that your first step in religion is right. Remember that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life," and that "no man cometh unto the Father but by Him." 2. *Avoid hindrances.* Many such will be thrown in your way (β). 3. *Keep heaven and your Forerunner in your eye.* The soul that looks unto Jesus can never lose its way (P. D. 2312–2314).—*Samuel Lavington: Sermons*, vol. ii. 379–396.

(α) Travellers tell us of some countries which are so full of aromatic plants and flowers that they perceive the fragrance at some distance, and are highly refreshed by the pleasing gales. Do you not think it is the same with the Christian traveller, as he bears up towards the heavenly country, of which "the land flowing with milk and honey" was a figure, a shadow, a very inadequate resemblance!—*Lavington.*

(β) Hindrances of various kinds we must expect to meet with: the world and our hearts are full of them; but there is a world where we shall get entirely above them; where there shall be nothing within us, nor without us, to stop our course or interrupt our joy.

"There, to fulfil His sweet commands,
Our speedy feet shall move;
No sin shall clog our winged zeal,
Or cool our burning love."

O Christians! with such prospects before us, is it not strange that we run no faster now? that when heaven, in respect to some of us, can be at no great distance, it should be possible for the comparatively trifling concerns of the world to engage our attention? that we do not spurn it from us with indignation, like the Pilgrim, who ran through Vanity Fair shutting his eyes and stopping his ears?—*Lavington.*

The Call of Cyrus a Fruit of the Captivity.

xli. 1, 2. *Keep silence before Me, &c.*

Behold how of old the Lord called the people and the distant nations into judgment, and condescended to plead and question with them concerning the dispensations of His providence, that they might see and know that He doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. "*Keep silence before Me, O islands, and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment.*" This is as it is written in the Book of Job: "*Gird up now thy loins as a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me.*"

The question which the prophet then proposes is one concerning the future, though in our English rendering it is put all in the past tense: "*Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to His foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings?*" The Hebrew language has not the same certainty in the distinctions of time with ours; and it may be mentioned that the ancient Greek translators have put the question partly in the future, to which indeed it wholly refers. [The tenses of the Septuagint in verses 2, 3, are the following:—Τις ἐξήγειρεν . . . ἐκάλεσεν . . . πορεύσεται . . . δώσει . . . ἐκστήσει . . . διώξεται . . . διελεύσεται.] But the prophet in spirit here takes his stand in the future, and calls into judgment and investigation the things, the persons, and events of the future, as if they were before him, ere even they had budded and sprung forth (ch. xlii. 9). "*Who hath raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to His foot, shall give the nations before him, and make him rule over kings? shall give them as the dust to his sword, and as the driven stubble to his bow? He shall pursue them and pass safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet. Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am He.*" Even in the first member of the sentence the meaning is really predictive of that which then existed only in God's purpose and in the preparation of His providence, who calleth the generations from the beginning. You will perceive more clearly that it has this prophetic force if you refer to verses 21–25: "*Produce your cause,*" &c.

It is generally agreed that there is here a prediction of Cyrus; but what I chiefly call your attention to is, that the whole work is claimed by God as His own. It was not merely He that had predicted it, but it was He that purposed it and brought it to pass. As He saith, "*Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am He.*" An erroneous idea of prediction has grown up, as if God had left the things predicted utterly loose from the control of His providence, and as if the marvel were only in the foresight, and not in the power, wisdom, and faithfulness displayed in the bringing to pass. Not thus speaks the Word of God, but the prediction is the declaration of God's purpose, and

the event is His bringing it to pass. It is thus they stand related to one another (Numb. xxiii. 19).

In our text, the question is not put as to the marvel involved in the *prediction*, but rather as to the overruling power and wisdom manifested in the *doing* of it. The question is not, Whose was the foresight? but, Whose was the accomplishment? To whom appertained the raising of this righteous man? Whose was his training? Whose were his victories? The fact of Cyrus's existence, viewed together with his character, actions, and achievements, was altogether more wonderful even than the prediction of him by name. And so will it be in regard to the predicted coming and glory of Christ. Men will cease to debate of the marvel of its being predicted when they see the greater marvel of its being brought to pass. Not that the correspondence of the prediction with its fulfilment will cease to be a subject of admiration; but the actual bringing such a thing to pass from the present state of the world is harder to be conceived than the prediction of anything future.

Now Cyrus was to the Gentiles a type of the Messiah, even as David or Solomon to the Jews; and accordingly we find him spoken of AS THE LORD'S ANOINTED (ch. xlv. 1). Comparing the things which are related of him with the history of Eastern kings and conquerors of his age or that preceding, and especially with the monstrous oppressions, butcheries, massacres, and cruelties recorded on the slabs of Nineveh, he seems like a man of another world. It is a gleam of sunshine breaking through thunder-clouds. The soberest and most truthful of the Greek philosophers (himself a statesman, general, and historian) has selected him as the pattern of a perfect prince, and made his education the theme of a most interesting and instructive book. Whence had he that education? Who raised up that righteous man from the east? called him to His foot? At whose feet was he brought up? and from whose precepts did he receive instruction in righteousness?

I think that we have here one of those examples in which the tribulation of the Lord's people has been made to work blessing to the human race. The ten tribes of Israel had been carried into captivity, and were placed in Halah and Habor, by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. Their princes were made eunuchs and officers in the palaces of their conquerors, and the daughters of Israel, admired for their beauty, sought after for the music of those exquisite songs of Zion, pitied for their exile and their sorrows, and honoured for their virtue, were not unfrequently made the favourite wives of the conquerors and princes among whom they were placed in captivity. The principles and character of the captives influenced the conquerors. The kingdom of heaven wrought after its own manner, like leaven hid in three measures of meal. Now the mother of Cyrus was a Mede, the daughter of the Median king; and Cyrus, though a Persian, was educated among the Medes, where the principles of the law of the Lord were silently working. Thus the Lord called him to His foot and instructed him; and the good seed in good ground brought forth an hundred-fold. From the rising of the sun he made mention of Jehovah's name. And so the captivity of Israel in the cities of the Medes served under the good providence of God to leaven the nation of the Medes, and to prepare an avenger of the cause of Judah upon Babylon, and a restorer of His ancient people to Jerusalem.—*W. B. Galloway, M.A.: Isaiah's Testimony for Jesus*, pp. 277–282.

LESSONS FROM THE HEATHEN WORKERS.

xli. 5–7. *The isles saw it, and feared, &c.*

These verses indicate the state of feeling which was created among the heathen nations by the rapid and victorious career of Cyrus. They remind us—1. *That a sense of common danger promotes fraternal feeling and activity* (vers. 5, 6). This has been often witnessed in the history of communities. Persecution, oppression, danger, will frequently unite them in one great movement for defence and safety, and thus call forth and develop principles that are too little cultivated in times of prosperity and security.

2. *Mutual help is best rendered when each man does his best in his own way* (ver. 7). In the building of a house, in the rendering of a performance, in the manufacture of an article, in the ruling of a state, the general interest is secured, not by all doing the same things, but by each doing his own individual part in honesty and fidelity. Even when an idol was to be made, the carpenter may encourage the goldsmith, &c. A fine lesson is here taught to Christian Churches. See it fully reasoned out in 1 Cor. xii.

3. *Even the superstitions of heathendom are a witness to the spiritual cravings of men.* We have here a pathetic example of the perversions amongst which idolatry grovels. In their panic-stricken state the people betake

themselves for safety to gods that first their own fingers must fashion. Think of a human soul bowing down to an image that a few moments ago was "fastened with nails that it should not be moved!" Yet we do injustice to heathenism, and do not rightly interpret it, if we suppose its significance lies wholly in these material objects. In reality we see here the human soul crying out for *Another*, an *Unseen*, an *Unknown*. The very groping of heathenism is so far a testimony to God, that it proclaims God to be in the worshipper before the worshipper seeks Him elsewhere. Amongst all our *modern* idolatries, too, idolatries of wealth, pleasure, fashion, power, &c., we see the uneasiness of souls who can find no settled rest in the things that are touched, and tasted, and handled. Though not definitely expressed, the yearning is for God Himself, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.—*William Manning.*

Thus the heathen helped each other (ver. 6). There are many seasons in which encouragement from our fellow-Christians is peculiarly soothing and grateful to the mind; for as "ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth a man his friend by hearty counsel" (Prov. xxvii. 9). This is true—1. *In the wintry day of adversity.* 2. *In the dreary night of affliction and bereavement.* It is one of the privileges as well as the duties of religion to "feel a brother's care," to "weep with them that weep," and to pour the balm of consolation into the bleeding hearts of our suffering friends. 3. *In the stormy day of persecution.* It was a saying of Martin Luther, that "the plough of persecution was yoked as early as the days of Cain; and it has been going upon the back of the Church ever since" (Gal. iv. 29; 2 Tim. iii. 12). 4. *In the time of fierce conflict and strong temptation.* 5. *When entering the vale of death.* The help we can thus afford we are bound to render.—*R. Bond: The Christian's Remembrancer*, p. 162, &c.

Passages in the history of idolatrous worship may be turned to account. Here certain idolaters were alarmed, and ran to seek relief of their gods. They are making a shrine or an idol; they are all in earnest. This suggests what we shall always see whenever we find *a model Church.* Such a Church is—

I. A scene of activity. Every one is at work. Life is a scene of activity in the physical universe, in the business world. We rejoice that intellectual activity has disturbed the darkness and torpor of the Middle Ages; the printing-press does a nobler work than the old feudal castle; brute force, exclusiveness, have had their day. It is still more encouraging when spiritual life comes into a Church. Then a happy activity reigns.

II. A scene of cheerful, courageous toil. The carpenter encourages the goldsmith. Many Churches are scenes of recriminating discouragement. How much the minister is helped by a little encouragement now and then! It need not be flattery. Let every man do his own work, but let there be mutual encouragement.

III. A scene of prompt industry and thorough work. There are few worse things for the development of any kind of life than dilatoriness. *Promptitude* in Church worship and work is much needed. And *thoroughness* no less. "He fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved." We want cloths that will not rip; bridges that will bear; characters that will stand temptation; friendships that will last. The model Church does its work thoroughly.

IV. All are working — actively, cheerfully, courageously, promptly, thoroughly—**for one common end** (Jer. vii. 18). They are all building a shrine or an altar. So the Church has one end. It is a unity, not a uniformity—a unity in spirit, in aim, in end.

V. Special marks of a model Church. 1. A common-sense sanctuary: central, easy of access, constructed so as to be a house of worship and instruction,—not of worship only, still less for spec

tacular effect. 2. Kindness to strangers. 3. Well-organised charities. 4. Truly sanctified, truly consecrated by the indwelling Spirit of God. This is the crown of all.—*E. P. Thwing, Ph.D.: Christian World Pulpit*, xxii. pp. 136–137.

Two Kinds of Help.

xli. 6. *They helped every one his neighbour, &c.*
xli. 10. *Fear not; I will help thee, &c.*

It is manifestly the intention of the prophet to exhibit the contrast between Israel and the heathen nations. In contemplating the promise of the 10th verse, we may be so absorbed by its boundless wealth, so amazed by its condescension, so cheered by its comfort, that we fail to notice the sombre background against which it is placed. There is help in both cases, but how different! In one case it is the help and encouragement which men give to one another in a vain, foolish, and desperate course; in the other it is the help that cometh from above. The rapid conquests of Cyrus throw the nations into alarm. What shall they do in this extremity?

I. *Look at the expedients to which idol-worshippers have recourse* (ver. 6). The carpenters and goldsmiths resolve to manufacture a strong set of gods, and to fix them securely. In the idol-factories the workmen stimulate one another. We may smile at such a gross delusion, as possible only among ignorant races in an age of superstition; but is there nothing corresponding to it among ourselves? We may regard image-worship with an air of scorn as too silly and infatuated ever to find place in Christianised communities; but there are many idols to which the unbelieving heart turns in the day of need and trial. The gods of our day have no outward embodiment, but not less loyal are their votaries to them. Idols are made of mammon and worldly ambitions, of services and ceremonies. Thus do the follies of a bygone age reproduce themselves in all their essential features. To see idolatry, you need not take a long journey to the South Sea Islands or Central Africa. In our scenes of commerce you may meet many a mammon-worshipper. In gay circles you may find crowds given up to the worship of fashion. In the very Church you may find the formalist who has made an idol of sacraments. These modern idolatries are godless and unbelieving; but while there is no faith in God, what an immense amount of faith of a different kind is exhibited! Believe! Why, they believe the most absurd things! *e.g.*, they make gold their trust; they believe that they may lead Christless lives, and yet somehow get to heaven at last. We speak of them as unbelievers, yet what faith they have! They believe far more than the Christian can. To them Christianity is irrational, yet what irrationalities they entertain! "O the credulity of unbelief," that accepts the most glaring absurdities to strengthen its position! And yet with all this rash credulity there is often an uneasy suspicion that all is not right and safe, and in a day of trouble they must help and encourage one another. Observe *the power of association and example* to blind men to the truth and strengthen them in bad principles. People think themselves all that is excellent if they do as others do, and are no worse than their neighbours; and so they keep each other in countenance, doing in company with each other what they would not do alone.

II. Turn now to the other side, and contemplate the *Divine help*. Here is Israel's confidence. It rests on the Almighty Helper.

1. It is help *guaranteed by past experience* (vers. 8, 9). How intimate the relation in which God stands to spiritual Israel! how gracious the acts He has done for them! how dear they

were to Him! What a powerful argument for hope and trust! To cast them off would be the undoing of all that He had done. How securely, then, the promise stands on the foundation of past favours. To the tried, doubting believer there is encouragement here. Your God not only condescends to sustain you with a promise, but to encourage your faith He points to past acts of mercy. He has brought you near; He calls you by endearing names, and appeals to a long experience of His grace and love. The past may be full of unfaithfulness on your part, but amid all there shine out God's acts of mercy. How can you reject the promise built on this experience? Help in the past guarantees help in the future.

2. *Help against opposition* (vers. 11, 12), and the reason is assigned (ver. 13). Israel's enemies will be frustrated. O Christian! what foes can harm you with God for your Almighty Helper? Plied with temptation, oppressed with fears, surrounded with dangers, you can yet say, "None of these things move me." All the hosts of evil are passing on to confusion, and through them you are marching to victory. Outward losses cannot injure your real life. These onsets of the foe are for the trial of faith (1 Pet. i. 7).

3. *Help in weakness* (vers. 14–16). The names "worm" and "men" (*i.e.*, mortals) are expressive of weakness and contempt. But how strong does the feeblest and meanest creature become when armed with a Divine commission and supported by Divine help! "With what," it has been asked, "may this new threshing instrument be armed but the Word of God?" (Heb. iv. 12). If God has a work to do, the unlikeliest instrument can be made sufficient for it. The worm is not the mean, feeble, and useless creature we think it. Darwin has shown us that earth-worms are the plowers of the soil and the producers of mould, thus by their combined labours fructifying the land. As in nature, so in grace (1 Cor. i. 27–29). Jesus became "a worm and no man;" and His people, few and weak, yet armed with His powerful help, go forth to the conquest of the world. Why, then, should you shrink from any mission on which He sends you, and why should you doubt of success? (2 Chron. xiv. 11).

4. *Help in want* (vers. 17–19). There is spiritual thirst quenched and spiritual refreshment provided. The desert becomes a lake, the wilderness a garden. God opens streams, not only in the valleys, but on the hills; "high places." This points to something above Nature. The whole description is obviously figurative, representing "comfort and refreshment and the largest spiritual blessings. As before there was an allusion to the call of Abraham and the exodus, so here to the journey through the desert when the rock was smitten. The words may include mercies shown to the exiles on their return; but their chief reference must be to the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and also in times to come" (Birks).

Now, what is the intention of this promise of manifold help? "Fear not, be not dismayed," or, as it has been rendered, "Look not anxiously around you for help." Rather look *up* (Ps. cxxi. 2). Vain is the *inward* look, for we have no help in ourselves; vain is the look *around*, for no man can redeem his brother; but look *up* (Ps. lx. 11), and listen to the Divine promise.—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

God's Friend.

(*A Sermon to the Young.*)

xli. 8. *Abraham, my friend.*

God here puts a very great honour upon His servant Abraham. He calls him His *friend*. What greater honour could there be than this? Notice—

I. How Abraham came to be the friend of God.

Suppose you met on the street a poor, ragged boy, you would very likely pity him, and might say, "That poor boy has got a bad home, and he will grow up a bad man, and will have no one to show him how to live an honest life." If you wished that you and he might become friends, what would be the first thing to do? Would you not have to tell him that you wanted to become his friend? He would no more think of asking you to be his friend than you would think of asking the Queen to be your friend. God wanted Abraham to be His friend, but how was Abraham to know that unless God told him? Abraham was in the midst of men who were worshippers of idols. As the Psalmist says, "They have mouths," &c. (Ps. cxxxv. 16, 17). God knew that Abraham would never come to be His friend unless He spoke to him first. (Read Gen. xii. 1–3.)

II. The time when Abraham became God's friend.

It was at a time when God had very few friends in this world. No doubt He had many friends in other worlds, but He had not made many in *this*. How many had He in the days of Noah? It is possible that He had not even so many in the days of Abraham.

There are some parts of the world where you have no friends,—in Patagonia, for instance, where all the people are savages. Some good missionaries went there once, and tried to teach the people about the Saviour; but they would not listen to Christ's servants, and starved them to death. Suppose one of the wild savages had taken the missionaries' part and become their friend, do you not think he would have been a brave man? But why do many people in this country dislike good people so much? It is just because *they are good*. Bad men do not want to be better; they "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." It is sad to think that even yet God has more enemies than friends in the world; but He has many more friends than in the day when He called Abraham, and told him to go and live amongst His enemies.

III. How Abraham showed that he was a friend of God.

1. "He builded an altar to the Lord" (Gen. xii. 7, 8). He was like a sailor or soldier who is not afraid to carry the Queen's standard into the midst of her enemies.

2. He always believed what God told him. God promised him a son, and although he had to wait a very long time before he had the son, he never gave up believing in God; he said to himself, "God would never have made me a promise if He did not mean to keep it; I am quite sure He is able to perform His promise, and that He will do so some day." True friends always believe each other.

3. Abraham always tried to do what God told him. He told him to offer up the beloved son, for whom he had waited so many years. And Abraham showed that he was willing to obey the voice of God. In the end he was taught a great lesson, viz., that God did not approve of human sacrifice—a thing commonly done—and so a ram was provided (Gen. xxii.)

IV. Lessons.

1. You can have Abraham's name. You, too, may be God's friend. Remember what Jesus said (John xv. 14; Mark iii. 35).

2. If you wish to have Abraham's great name, you must often speak to God. The comfort of having friends is that we can talk to them, and tell them our troubles, and find that they share our joys.

3. If you choose God for your friend, you will have made the best possible choice. Whatever other friends you have, accept the loving invitation of your Heavenly Father—let Him be your dearest Friend; become, like Abraham, "the friend of God."—*Sermons for Boys and Girls*, pp. 80–87.

(*A Sermon for Adults.*)

Much that is honourable is recorded of Abraham in the Holy Scriptures, but

nothing equal to this. He was a man of extensive possessions, a venerable patriarch, the founder of two powerful nations, the ancestor of a double race of kings, the father of the faithful, but, as his highest distinction, "he was called *the friend of God*" (*cf.* 2 Chron. xx. 7; James ii. 23).

I. THE DISPOSITION AND CONDUCT OF GOD TOWARDS ABRAHAM.

He distinguished him as His friend —1. *By His large munificence.* It is not perhaps too much to affirm that God gave to Abraham more than He ever gave to any beside. He gave him not only "exceeding great and precious promises," but the actual fulfilment of them in all their variety and extent, either to himself or his posterity. The grant of Jehovah to this patriarch included a son in his old age, and that his descendants should inherit the fertile land of Canaan; that he should become the father of many and mighty nations, and especially that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed. What does He give to others whom He designates His friends? "His own Son," "all spiritual blessings," "a heavenly country," "a crown of glory."

2. *By His intimate communion with him.* "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." In the plains of Mamre, as Abraham sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day, the Lord appeared to him in all the condescension of His favour, attended by two celestial messengers in visible form: there He conversed with him, and the communion He maintained was intimate and friendly in an unusual degree (Ps. xxv. 14; Isa. lvii. 15).

3. *By His affectionate confidence in him.* "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?" He meditated the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; but how can He conceal the intention from Abraham, His friend? He told him, therefore, of the judgment which He was about to execute on the guilty cities. The sentiment which Amos and our Lord express is remarkable (Amos iii. 7; John xv. 15).

4. *By His sacred fidelity to him.* At an early period Jehovah entered into covenant with His servant, as a man covenants with his friend; and He sware unto him because He loved him. He made the most solemn engagements to visit him with favour, and ratified these engagements in the most clear and condescending manner. Were they ever violated? No! As often, therefore, as the appellation "the God of Abraham" occurs, we have a recognition of covenant transactions and an appeal to testimony of inviolable faithfulness. The covenant of God is His solemn *promise;* and this He hath given not to Abraham only, but to every believer as His "friend" (Heb. vi. 17, 18).

II. ABRAHAM'S DISPOSITION AND CONDUCT TOWARDS GOD.

Friendship ought to be mutual. Observe—

1. *Abraham's steady faith in God.* "He believed in God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God" (James ii. 23). Faith was the grace for which he was most remarkable, and in which he particularly excelled. He is denominated "faithful Abraham," and the "father of the faithful." "In hope he believed against hope, and was strong in faith, giving glory to God." In such degree as we live in the exercise of faith we are entitled to this honourable distinction, "the friends of God." Faith in God is cordial reliance on His testimony. It is "taking God at His word" (H. E. I. 1877–1881).

2. *Abraham's holy fellowship with God.* He was much devoted to God, and enjoyed special nearness to Him. At the time when he removed from place to place, it is remarked that wherever he rested, "there he built an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the Name of the Lord." We need only to instance his intercession on behalf of Sodom. (Read Gen. xviii.) Thus let your life be a life of fellowship with Heaven; and the closer this communion is maintained, the higher your enjoyment will rise Friends love to

converse with each other, and do you converse with God.

3. *Abraham's cheerful obedience to God.* We have many facts in proof of this assertion. When he "went out not knowing whither he went," it was in obedience to the command of God. When he manifested such a temper of peace in the separation which occurred between him and Lot, it was in compliance with a heavenly ruling in his heart. But the most prominent act, the noblest proof of the patriarch's obedience, relates to the sacrifice of his son (Gen. xxii. 2; Heb. xi. 17–19). Let it be remembered our obedience is the best proof of character, and the surest test of the disposition of the heart (John xv. 14).

IMPROVEMENT.—1. Learn the true dignity of man. It is to have fellowship with Heaven and friendship with God; being the "children of God," &c.

2. Be thankful for the grace which you have found. Once you were "children of wrath," &c., now friends.

3. Confide more implicitly and affectionately in Him who hath done so much for you. Friends have a mutual interest in what each other is.

4. Enjoy your comforts with grateful satisfaction. What a friend gives us he wishes us to enjoy (H. E. I. 307).

5. Learn to endure trials with calm submission. We can bear that from a friend which we cannot bear from an enemy.

6. Beware you offend not this Friend. "I was wounded in the house of my friends." The question which Absalom put to Hushai is pointed and appropriate: "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?"—*Thornhill Kidd: Village Sermons*, pp. 310–318.

THE SWEET HARP OF CONSOLATION.

xli. 10. *Fear thou not; for I am with thee.*

Saul was subject to fits of deep despondency, but when David played on his harp the evil spirit departed, overcome by the subduing melody. The text is such a harp. Its notes quiver to the height of ecstasy, or descend to the hollow bass of the deepest grief.

I. NOTE THE TIMES WHEN ITS SWEET STRAINS ARE MOST NEEDED.

1. *When we are racked with much physical pain.* 2. *In our relative sorrows*, borne personally by those dear to us. 3. *When all the currents of providence run counter to us;* when, after taking arms against a sea of troubles, we are being swept down the stream. 4. *In the midst of unusual responsibilities, heavy labours, and great enterprises.* 5. *When one stands alone in the midst of opposition.* 6. *When we go down to death.*

Thus all through life the saints march to the music of this harp, as the Israelites set forward to the notes of the silver trumpets.

II. HEAR ITS NOTES DISTINCTLY.

Their sweetness melts into each other, but each string may be touched severally and by itself. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." What does it mean?

1. *I am with thee in deepest sympathy.* As Baxter puts it—

"Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before."

2. *The Lord is with us in community of interests.* God Himself would be dishonoured if true believers should fail. 3. *I am with thee in providential aid.* We do not believe half enough in the providence of God. Providence is strikingly punctual. 4. *God is with us in secret sustaining power.* It is said of Christ, "There appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him." 5. *By sensible manifestations of His presence.* These are made to the opening spiritual sense. This cannot be described. Who shall describe gleams of the sunlight of Paradise? But we can be as sure of them as we are sure that we are in the body, and see the rays of the sun. In such moments—

"Should earth against my soul engage,
And hellish darts be hurled,
Then I can smile at Satan's rage,
And face a frowning world."

III. MEDITATE MUCH UPON THE SWEETNESS OF THOSE NOTES.

1. *The comfort of the text excels all other comfort under heaven.* God's "I am with thee" is better than the kindest assurance of the best of friends. 2. *There is here all the comfort that heaven itself could afford.* We have the chariots of God, which are twenty thousand; but better than that, we have God Himself. 3. *Here is something sufficient for all emergencies.* In the subsequent part of this chapter we find one engaged in a service, and it is written, "I will strengthen thee," &c.; then he is engaged in warfare (ver. 15); then he becomes a traveller (vers. 17, 18); then a husbandman (ver. 19); so, no matter where we may be, God is with us. 4. Divide the words, and view them separately. *I am;* here is self-existence, eternity, independence. *I AM* becomes the friend of His people. Note the tense of it—not *I was*, not *I shall be;* but *I am*. *I am*—what? I am *with thee*, who art poor and feeble.

IV. THE TEXT NEEDS THAT THE EAR BE TUNED BEFORE ITS MUSIC CAN BE APPRECIATED.

It is not every one that understands the delights of harmony in ordinary music. You must have faith,—the more faith, the sweeter music. You must believe in a real God—not in a myth; your faith must give you eyes to see God. Such trust is human omnipotence. May God bless us with this faith!—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (1867), pp. 385–396.

Men are liable to be afraid whenever they find themselves in the midst of perils. They need a prescription against fear, not against feeling. Peril surrounds us like an atmosphere. "Through much tribulation," of some sort, "we must enter the kingdom" of heaven (John xvi. 33). The old Stoics believed that man became excellent in proportion as he became hardened. Christianity has no sympathy with this prescription—insensibility to pain or pleasure.

I. *Some of the things of daily life that man is apt to fear.* Take not a human catalogue, but a Divine one (Rom. viii. 35). We find there the whole list of what man has more or less to go through. (Explain and dwell upon the perils in detail.)

II. *The basis of our triumphs over every fear is God present with us.* To be alone is to aggravate our grief. In every condition God says, "I am with thee." What is the *nature* of this presence? It is not God's essential, but His special presence—cheering, protecting, preserving. Will inspire you with fearlessness. Mark the *speciality* of it, "I am with *thee*"—with the individual Christian.—*J. Cumming, D.D.: The Daily Life*, pp. 335–360.

AWAY WITH FEAR.

xli. 10. *Fear thou not, &c.*

The later chapters of Isaiah are full of encouragement. Commotions may rend the nations, but God's people shall abide in safety. Their safety in Him contrasts with the insecurity of those that trusted in idols, the work of their own hands. The Lord, moreover, had especially adopted and chosen Israel. He had called Abraham out of a distant land; had given him importance and influence; had settled the country on his posterity; had never cast them off, notwithstanding their frequent deviations from the line of fidelity to Him. In them the prophet sees the representatives of those whom at all times He will distinguish by His special regard. The truth contained in our text is applicable always. It is everlasting truth. It is the Christian antidote to fear. The Christian's confidence is encouraged; his timidity is deprecated.

I. CONFIDENCE ENCOURAGED.

The encouragement is drawn—1. *From God's relation to His people.* "I am thy God." Dark is the lot of the man who has no God, who has lost faith. But there are many to whom God is intellectually a truth, to whom, nevertheless, He is not a reality. They live without Him. No praise, no prayer ascends to Him. There is no regard to Him in their daily life. His authority is a dead letter to them. The moral influence of this is perceptible in their indifference to spiritual influences; in the earthliness of their principles; in their low standard of obligation; in their helplessness when overtaken by calamity. In all this the Christian possesses an unspeakable advantage. With his faith in God he lives in a higher atmosphere of thought, and feeling, and moral impulse. In the deepest trouble, the fact that he has a God is a stay. For the Christian idea of God is not that of a cold abstraction or an object of awful dread. It is warmed and glorified by the assurance of personal interest. Reconciled to Him by faith in the death of His Son, consecrated by a complete surrender, devoted by a love that takes Him into their inmost heart, they appropriate to themselves all that God is. All His power, and love, and faithfulness is theirs. "I am *thy* God." 2. *From God's presence with His people.* "I am with thee." Is He not everywhere? Throughout the universe no place can be found where God is not. By this assurance He means something more than the universally diffused presence of His personality. He is with them in a sense different and peculiar; as a Friend for the purpose of influence, animation, protection. We are morally stronger, happier, better because He is there. We feel that a blessing comes with Him. 3. *From God's promises to His people.* How numerous are the promises! God's Word is like a garden gay with flowers of every beauteous hue, which His children are at liberty to gather freely. We need strength; life's battle must be fought; life's work must be done. Sometimes we feel like men who have no power. But, as when we have addressed ourselves to some daily task, our energy was found equal to it, so in the spiritual conflict and work we have found ourselves supplied with energy and power from invisible sources. Was it not God who, according to His promise, invigorated mind and will? Was it not Christ who strengthened us? "I will strengthen thee." Or suppose the burden has been too great for our unaided strength. One cannot carry the burden, but two may. One cannot accomplish the work, but a number can. One soldier cannot fight the battle, but the army may fight and win. "I will help." Invisible hands take hold of the labour. Invisible armies range themselves in serried ranks at our side. Angelic hosts come flying down with aid to such as cry to heaven. Or are you sinking down beneath the floods of trouble? All power over yourself has gone. Already you are encircled in the arms of death. Unexpectedly you feel another arm underneath and around you. It lifts you above the wave. It is the everlasting arm. It is the right hand of God's righteousness. It upholds and sustains you until the peril is overpast. It places your feet on a rock. Such are some of the promises. They are all Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus unto them that believe. In combination with their interest in God and His perpetual presence they are the grounds of their encouragement and the antidote to their fears.

II. TIMIDITY DEPRECATED.

"Fear thou not; be not dismayed." The future is before us; we cannot be indifferent to it. The state of mind deprecated is that which is disturbed and anxious because calamity is apprehended. Dismay looks on every side anxiously, like one who thinks himself pursued. It destroys comfort and energy. The timid soldier is a coward when he should be courageous and brave. Timid Christians, whose faith is feeble, who are the victims of fear, must be encouraged by the antidotes to fear that are found in the Divine relation to His people, in the Divine pre-

sence, in the precious promises. 1. *Do you fear the non-performance of your duties?* Such as holy obedience, self-discipline, the consistent walk of a Christian, the Christian work which the Lord calls on you to do. Be clear that it is your duty; that He calls you. And then address yourself boldly to it; not in your own strength, but looking for His help. "I will strengthen. I will help." 2. *Do you fear the power of temptation?* Some unknown and undefined temptation in the future, or some known, present, easily besetting sin. Is your face against it? Keep it against it and fight. But seek His strength. 3. *Do you fear the approach of trouble?* The mysterious future. Some trouble looming. Jesus is near, though you may not perceive Him. As when He walked on the sea. "It is I; be not afraid." 4. *Do you fear the hour of death?* It is a dark valley. It is a cold river. You shudder. Jesus removes the fear (Heb. ii. 14, 15). Your chariot waits.

This antidote to fear is addressed to faith. We are not to look at the seen, but at the unseen. Let fear be dismissed. Let Christian courage triumph.—*J. Rawlinson.*

There is here strikingly brought before us the superiority of the religious man over the worldling. But even he is subject to fear. Idolatry and superstition have easily gained a footing in man's heart in all times. On account of these God's people were about to be sent into captivity. The prophet is stirred up to cheer the faithful among them. Discrimination is the soul of instruction. There is an outward literal idolatry, and there is an inward spiritual idolatry. The text comes to cheer those amongst us who are determined to stand out against the latter, to which the temptation is as strong as ever. How are we to stand?

I. LOOK AT SOME OF THE REASONS WHY GOD'S SERVANTS HAVE OCCASION TO FEAR.

1. *Our own nature is our enemy.* "The flesh lusteth against the spirit." But is not the believer's nature a changed one? The believer is regenerated; but to grow from childhood to the manhood of faith implies vast experience. That experience declares that whilst we are justified through the righteousness of Christ, sanctification is a gradual work. There is the Christ aspect and the man aspect of this question. He who knows well what this means does not wonder that the Apostle feared lest he should be "a castaway" (H. E. I. 1053–1062). 2. *The world is our enemy.* To make the world subserve our highest interests is a lesson beyond the alphabet of the Christian life. The young Christian is exposed to fear of the world's ridicule and opposition. 3. There is also *the great enemy.* In seeking to fulfil life's duties, you will find this enemy, as Jesus did in the wilderness (1 Pet. v. 8; H. E. I. 1666–1674). 4. *The thought of fear.* The very thought of it; the possibility of it (Jer. xii. 5).

II. REGARD THE ENCOURAGEMENTS OF THE TEXT.

1. The first encouragement is found in *the Divine presence:* "I am with thee." The first disciples had confidence and courage in Christ's presence (John xiv.) The soldiers of Napoleon felt no fear in his presence; but cried, "Long live the Emperor! lead us, and we go to victory or death." The believer should dismiss his fears when he hears the Eternal say, "I am with thee." 2. Here is *the most endearing relationship in the universe.* "Be not dismayed; for I am thy God." Supreme and blessed assurance is found in being able to say, "My Lord and my God!" One of the finest things after affliction is to find strength returning and weakness departing. The downcast may know gladness and gratitude as they hear God saying, "I will strengthen thee." 3. Here is *a recognition of our need.* "I will help thee." This implies that we are known to be carrying a burden too heavy for us. Weare tired; but there is a Traveller by our side, who seeks to help us. 4. He offers *effectual*

support: "Yea, I will uphold with the right hand of My righteousness." The burden-bearer is ready to fall by not allowing the Lord to take his heavy load; but the Lord is saying to him, "I will uphold thee." Of what sort is this upholding? There is no left-hand work with God; no sinister work; it is all *right-hand* work. All that it brings is "righteousness." To appreciate this encouragement is to know that there is none like it.

Carry the lesson to your own blessed experience. Fear not; care not for the world's scorn or the world's smile. Remember there is one thing needful, and hold it fast.—*A. Morton Brown, D.D.: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xv. pp. 353–355.

To whom are these words spoken? for we must not steal from God's Scripture any more than from man's treasury. We have no more right to take a promise to ourselves that does not belong to us than we have to take another man's purse. They were spoken—1. To God's *chosen* ones (ver. 8). 2. To those whom God has *called* (ver. 9), effectually, personally called, as Mary was when Jesus said unto her, "Mary," and that gracious voice thrilled through her soul, and she responded to Him and said to Him, "Master!" 3. They are God's *servants* (ver. 8), doing not their will, but His will. 4. They are *those whom He has not rejected from His service*, in spite of the imperfections of which they are penitently conscious (ver. 9). To these every honey-dropping word of this text belongs.

I. A VERY COMMON DISEASE OF GOOD MEN—FEAR.

1. *This disease came into man's heart with sin.* Adam never was afraid of God till he had broken His commands, but then (Gen. iii. 8). It is consciousness of sin that "makes cowards of us all." Sin is the mother of the fear which hath torment.

2. *Fear continues in good men because sin continues in them.* If they had attained to perfect love, it would cast out fear. But this is not their blessedness yet, and they are often cast down (H. E. I. 1051–1062).

3. Fear coming in by sin, and being sustained by sin, *readily finds food upon which it may live.* When the believer looks within, he sees abundant reasons for fear. Grace is there, but fear is blind to the better nature, and fixes its gaze upon that which is carnal (H. E. I. 2680, 4470–4474).

4. If fear finds food within, *it also very readily finds food without.* Sometimes it is poverty, or sickness, or the recollection of the past, or dread of the future. Desponding people can find reasons for fear where no fear is. They have a little trouble-factory in their hearts, and they sit down and use their imaginations to meditate terror.

5. *In certain instances the habit of fearing has reached a monstrous growth.* Some think it a right thing to be always fearing, and are half suspicious of a man who has strong faith. They even call assurance "presumption." Shun the unbelief that apes humility, and seek after that unstaggering faith in the naked promise of a faithful God which is the truest meekness in His sight. I would not blame all who are much given to fear, for in some it is rather their disease than their sin, and more their misfortune than their fault. In God's family there are some who are constitutionally weak, and will probably never outgrow that weakness until they have entered into rest. I would give them just enough of the tonic of censure to make them feel that it is not right to be unbelieving, but I would not censure their despondency so much as to make them think they are not God's children.

6. *Even the strongest of God's servants are sometimes the subjects of fear.* His mightiest heroes sometimes have their fainting-fits. Elijah (1 Kings xix. 4).

II. GOD'S COMMAND AGAINST FEAR.

"Fear thou not; be not dismayed." That precept is absolute and unqualified; we are not to fear at all. Why?

1. *Because it is sinful.* It almost

always results from unbelief, the sin of sins. Unbelief takes away the very Godhead from God; for if He be not true, if He be not fit to be believed, He is not God.

2. *It feeds sin.* The man who believes in God will fight with any temptation, but the man who does not believe in Him is ready to fall into any snare (H. E. I. 1920–1922). He who cannot trust God in times of difficulty soon begins to trust in the devil, and to adopt some of his expedients for relief; and he who trusts the devil soon finds himself in the snare.

3. *It injures yourself.* Nothing can weaken you so much or make you so unhappy as to be distrusting (H. E. I. 2050–2054).

4. *Fear weakens the believer's influence, and so causes mischief to others.* Converts are not brought to Christ through unbelieving Christians. It is faith that wins souls (H. E. I. 1090). For your own sake, for your neighbour's sake, fear not, neither be dismayed!

III. THE PROMISES WHICH GOD GIVES TO PREVENT FEAR AND DISMAY.

1. *Many a man fears because he is afraid of loneliness.* More or less we must be alone in the service of God—in suffering—in old age—or in a strange land. But, believer, you are not alone, because God is with you. Omnipotence will be with you to be your strength, omniscience to be your wisdom, immutability to be your succour, all the attributes of God to be your treasury. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee" (P. D. 3145).

2. *Men fear they may lose all they have in the world,* and they know very well that if they lose their property they usually lose their friends (H. E. I. 23, 24, 2151–2159). But here the second promise comes in, "Be not dismayed, for I am thy God." Jonah's gourd was withered, but Jonah's God was not. Your goods may go, but your God will not; and having Him, you may laugh at penury and distress, for you shall lack no good thing (Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 12).

3. *Fear sometimes arises from a sense of personal weakness.* "I have a battle to fight, and I am very weak; I have a work to do for God before I die, and I have not sufficient power to perform it." But here comes in the next word of the text: "I will strengthen thee." God can, if He wills it, put Samson's strength into an infant's arm. Transfer the figure to spiritual strength. The strength we need for our work does not lie in us, or it would be all over with us. It comes from God, and He will give it. Preacher, Sunday-school teacher, look up to Him and take courage. There was a bush in the wilderness, and it was nothing to look at—nothing but a bush; but oh! how it glowed with splendour when God came into it; it burned with fire, and yet "was not consumed." God can come into *you*, and can make you blaze with glory like the bush in Horeb.

4. *Some fear that friendly succour will fail.* A fear apt to trouble those who have large purposes of benevolence towards their fellow-men. The co-operation of others seems necessary to their accomplishment, and in the critical moment they may fall away. But let them note this word: "*I* will help thee." (*a*) If the work on which we have set our heart is God's work, He will send to our aid all the succour we need.

5. Many a child of God is afflicted with a fear *that he shall one day, in some unguarded moment, bring dishonour upon the cross of Christ.* This is a very natural fear, and in some respects a very proper fear. But grasp this precious word: "I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." The self-same hand that spans both sea and shore bears up the unpillared arch of heaven and holds the stars in their place. Can it not bear *you* up? Oh, rest upon it, and you shall not be cast down! (H. E. I. 2363–2373, 2791).

Here you have angels' food; nay, the very bread of life itself lies in these choice words. The only fear I have is lest you should miss them

through unbelief. Go home, and take this text with you in the hand of faith. It shall prove to you like the widow's barrel of meal and cruse of oil. — *C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 930.

(a.) You know what a grand matter is God's help. A minister was one day bringing his books upstairs into another room, for he was going to have his study on the first floor instead of downstairs, and his little boy wanted to help father carry some of the books. "Now," said the father, "I knew he could not do it, but as he wanted to be doing something, to please him and to do him good by encouraging his industry, I told him he might take a book and carry it up." So away he went, and picked out one of the biggest volumes—Caryl on Job or Poli Synopsis, I should think—and when he had climbed a step or two up the stairs, down he sat and began to cry. He could not manage to carry his big book any further; he was disappointed and unhappy. How did the matter end? Why, the father had to go to the rescue, and carry both the great book and the little man. So, when the Lord gives us a work to do, we are glad to do it, but our strength is not equal to the work, and then we sit down and cry, and it comes to this, that our blessed Father carries the work and carries the little man too, and then it is all done, and done gloriously. It is a simple illustration, but may it comfort some desponding heart. "Yea, I will help thee."—*Spurgeon.*

I. There are fears which rise in the heart at the thought of God. Let a man confront himself even in imagination with Jehovah, and the first and strongest emotion within him is terror. We have all trembled when in darkness and solitude we have thought of God (Job iv. 13–17). An horror of great darkness creeps over us when first the truth takes possession of us that we shall stand naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The root of all this is our guilt. We have broken God's law, and however we may forget that at other times, it is the first thing we remember when we feel that God is near, so that if we could, we would flee from His presence. How many illustrations of this we have in the Scriptures! (Gen. iii. 8; Exod. xx. 19; Judges xiii. 20; Isa. vi. 5; Luke ii. 9, v. 8). Whenever in our own case anything occurs which seems to us to belong to that mystic borderland between the visible and the unseen, we have the same spirit-shudder, which must be traced to the same cause. The mercury becomes peculiarly sensitive when the thunder-cloud is overhead; the needle is most restless when some magnetic substance is near; and so when conscience, by reason of any occurrence in providence, feels God to be close at hand, it becomes most active and fills the soul with alarm. There are few who would not quake with fear if they could be compelled to think for but one short hour on God, judgment, and eternity.

Now see how the Gospel meets this dread with its benignant "fear not." In all the cases in the Bible in which God is represented as coming to talk with men, He begins with these words, "Fear not." He thereby says, in effect, that we have a wrong idea concerning Him when we think of Him with terror. We regard Him as an enemy, whereas He is our best friend. We run away from Him, when, if we really knew Him, we should betake ourselves to Him in the sure confidence that He will receive us. You ask me how I know all this. I point in answer to the cross of Christ, whereon our innocent Substitute gave Himself up to death for us, that we might be righteously forgiven. That cross, with all its mysterious accompaniments, was God's great "Fear not!" spoken to the trembling heart of humanity. It is the declaration of His love to thee. Take hold of that, and thy fear will give place to gratitude, as His forgiveness comes into thy soul (H. E. I. 2233–2236, 2319–2321).

II. There are fears which arise in the heart as we think of our fellowmen. We have been often hampered in our discharge of duty by our regard to those who are around us (Prov. xxix. 25). There is a course of conduct which we clearly see that it is our duty to take, but if we follow it we shall forfeit the friendship of many whose esteem we have been accustomed to value, and so we pause and try to compromise with conscience.

Or we are afraid of the opposition of our fellows, and so we are brought to a halt. We have many such cases described in Scripture. Abraham lying to preserve his life; Aaron making the golden calf to save himself from being stoned; Saul sinning because he feared the people and obeyed their voice; Herod beheading John the Baptist for his oath's sake and the sake of them that were with him; Peter vacillating at Antioch when he saw those who had come from Jerusalem. And we have been ourselves too often in the same condemnation.

Now see how the Gospel comes to us with its "Fear not" for this ensnaring trepidation. It assures us that God is on our side. It declares that *He* will never leave us nor forsake us. It does not declare, indeed, that we shall have exemption from suffering, but that we shall be upheld under it, and supported through it, and be at length more than conquerors. To die is oftentimes to conquer. Who was the real victor on Calvary? Was it not He who bowed His head and said, "It is finished"? Who was the conqueror when the proto-martyr

> "Heeded not reviling tones,
> Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
> Though cursed and scorned and bruised with stones!"

This "Fear not" does not guarantee immunity from trouble, but it is God's word of reassurance whispered into the ears of His tempted, tried, and sometimes weak and irresolute people; and when it is heard in faith, the timid one becomes courageous, and takes his place among the heroes of humanity. See the efficacy of this sovereign antidote to the fear of men on those valiant youths who stood before the monarch of Babylon (Dan. iii. 16–18). Behold its power in the conduct of the Apostles when they stood before the Council (Acts v. 29). Behold its success in the aged Palissy, when the French monarch said to him in his cell in the Bastile, "Palissy, if you do not recant, I shall be forced to give you up." And he replied, "Forced, sire; this is not to speak like a king; but they who force you cannot force me. I can die." And what met the need of these great sufferers is surely sufficient to meet ours. Oh, ye timid ones, who are terrified by the men around you, hear a few reassuring words from God (Deut. xx. 3, 4; Neh. i. 8; Isa. xli. 14, 15, and also ver. 10). There are multitudes of promises of this same character, and if we would but keep hold of them, no mortal influence would ever be able to move us from our purpose, and no storm of temptation would ever drive us from our anchorage. The Lord is on thy side, therefore go forward undauntedly, for He will make rough places smooth, and crooked things straight before thee (Rev. ii. 10).

III. **There are fears which spring up in the heart at the thought of the future.** We know not what a day may bring forth, and whenever we permit ourselves to think of what may come upon us, except when we do so in the light of the Gospel, we become despondent and afraid. In all there is some anxiety. In some it may have regard to temporal concerns. In others it may respect their spiritual safety. In others it may centre in their children. In others, still, it may relate to the time and manner of their death. In many more it may be the future of the spirit-world that puts fear into their souls, and the thought of judgment and eternity may ride like a nightmare over their troubled breasts.

Each has his own dread, but see how, with its consoling "Fear not," the Gospel hushes the heart of each to peace, even as a mother calms her troubled infant into quietness (Matt. vi. 25–34). In so far as the future of this world is concerned Jesus says, "Take no anxious thought for it." Learn a lesson here from the great German reformer, who, in a time of terrible perplexity and with a troubled heart, looked out into the twilight, and saw a bird hop into the shade of a thick tree. It stayed a few minutes on its first perch to sing its even-song, and then leaping upon a higher

branch, it placed its head below its wing and went to sleep. "Happy little bird," said Luther; "he sings his song and goes to sleep, and lets God think for him; and I will do the same." Or is it your spiritual safety that disturbs you? Then hear what Jesus says (John x. 27–29). Or are you anxious for your children? Then the promise is unto you and to your children; and if you will only do your present duty by them, and commit them in earnest prayer to God, all will yet be well with them. Or is it death you fear? Then for that there is a special assurance in these words addressed to the Patmos seer (Rev. i. 18): "Fear not; I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of Hades and of death." Yes! at the girdle of the Son of man hang the keys of Hades and of death. The door for your departure will not open until He unlock it; and when He opens it, He will be there Himself to greet you. Why then be afraid? (H. E. I. 1634, 1642, 1643). Then as to judgment and eternity, why should we fear for them except for sin? and has not Jesus appeared already to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself? So we come back to the great centre of the Gospel, the atoning death of Christ, through faith in which alone we shall have boldness in the day of judgment, and happiness throughout eternity. What has the Christian to fear from a Judge who is at the same time his Redeemer? And if Christ be with us through eternity, that is all we need.—*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*

Fear is very prevalent among Christian people, and is productive of very disastrous results. It seems to be the natural temperament of some and the easy habit of others. In the pious soul a more improper mental attitude could scarce be indulged; for of all men the Christian has the least to fear, as no ultimate injury can come to him, even though apparent dangers threaten him.

I. THE OCCASIONS OF FEAR.

Sometimes occasioned by—

1. *The circumstances of the Christian life* (Matt. xiv. 30). Fear is often awakened by life's physical necessities, by its secular conditions, by its intellectual anxieties, and by its moral inability to achieve duty in its highest method.

2. *The phenomena of the material universe* (Mark iv. 40). Man feels his weakness when brought into contact with the unyielding powers of nature; they heed not his cries, they care not for his rebuke. They are destructive. Man trembles before them. He fears lest they should lead him to the grave, or do him bodily harm. Such phenomena ought not to render timid the Christian heart, as the elements of nature are ruled by the Father's hand.

3. *The phenomena of the spirit-world.* Sometimes men imagine that they see visitants from the other world of being; and these, coming in strange garb, with mysterious tidings and ghastly appearance, inspire the human heart with fear. Such timidity is a folly. Heaven has better missions for the immortal good than to send them to frighten the inhabitants of the earth; and hell takes better care of its unhappy crowd than to allow them a momentary release. Such visitations are imaginary. Only the superstitious are troubled with them.

4. *Manifestations of the Divine presence* (Luke v. 8; Rev. i. 17). The soul of man is too weak and sinful to bear without fear the near and the immediate approach of God.

II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF FEAR.

It often causes men—

1. *To sink into the troubles of life* (Matt. xiv. 31). Fear always makes men sink in their own estimation as valorous; in the estimation of others as cowards; and often into sore perplexities of circumstances.

2. *To be anxious without true occasion.* God's ancient people—the disciples. Fear always makes men over-anxious, and makes them imagine danger when there is none. It makes them timorous in every enterprise, even though they have a refuge in the event of peril.

3. *To be unfit for the duties intrusted to them* (Rev. i. 19). It is not probable that a timid Christian will be very efficient in the public duties of life.

III. THE CURE OF FEAR.

Fear not! Fear will be cured by—

1. *A thorough reliance on the providence of God.*

2. *A complete knowledge of Christ* (Rev. i. 17, 18). The more we know of Christ in His offices and attributes, His holy sympathy with men, the less will be our fear.

3. *A holy mastery over self*, obtained by a consciousness of moral purity. A strong soul, well ruled by the will, will not often be timid, especially if it can fall back upon a pure inner life. Sin is the largest cause of fear.

LESSONS.—1. To trust God. 2. To know Christ. 3. To rule self.—*J. S. Exell: The Study*, Third Series, p. 576.

THE BEST HELPER.

(Sermon for the Young.)

xli. 10. *I will help thee.*

Two persons are spoken of here: *I* and *thee*. "I," the person speaking, is Jesus, our God and Saviour; and "thee," the person spoken to, means everybody who needs His help and seeks it. In this passage, then, Jesus is presented to our notice as a *Helper*. We may have many helpers, but Jesus is the best. There are *four* reasons why Jesus is the best Helper. He is so—

I. Because He is always near to help. If we were hungry, it would not help us to know that a hundred miles off there was a nice loaf of bread. If we were travelling in the desert of Arabia, would it help us any to remember that in England there were many cool and sparkling springs of water? God is always near when people are in trouble. He always *could* help them if He saw it best. But sometimes He sees good reasons for not helping those who are in need. *E.g.*, there are the wicked men nailing Jesus to the cross. He is God's own dear Son. God loves Him as no other father ever loved a son. God is near. He sees all His sufferings. The angels of heaven see them. Multitudes of them would fly in an instant to His relief, if God would let them. But no! And *why* was this? Ah! there was reason enough for it. If Jesus had not died, none of us would have been saved. And just so in every case; there is always a good reason for it, although we cannot always tell what the reason is.

II. Because He is always able to help. Sometimes there are many helpers, and they are near at hand, but they are *not able to help*. We read a great deal in the Bible about those whom Jesus has helped. There we find how He helped Abel when he offered an acceptable sacrifice to God. He helped Noah to build the ark which saved himself and his family. He helped Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. He helped David to slay the great giant with nothing in his hand but a sling and a stone. He helped Daniel when he was cast into the lions' den. He helped Daniel's three friends when they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. He helped Paul to preach the Gospel; and, in the days of cruel persecution, He helped the "noble army of martyrs" to bear with patience the chain and the dungeon; yea, and even to sing for joy when the flames were kindling around them and the fire consuming their bodies. Rich men can help us with their money, wise men with their counsels, and Christians with their prayers; but Jesus can help us in everything. He can help you in studying your lessons and in all your daily duties. He can help kings and governors to rule and subjects to obey. He can help ministers to preach and

people to hear. He can help parents and children, teachers and scholars. Paul said, "I can do *all things* through Christ strengthening (or helping) me:" and we may say and do the same, if we look to Him for His help.

III. Because He is always willing to help. We read in the Bible about the rich man and Lazarus: the rich man was *able* to help, but he was not *willing*. Jesus is always willing; He may not send the help just in the way we wish, but, in one way or other, He is sure to send it. He tells us that He is more willing to help those who come to Him than parents are to give bread to their children.

IV. Because He is always kind in helping. There are some people who are willing and able to help others, and who do help them too, but it is done in a rough manner. On one occasion, while Jesus was on earth, the Pharisees brought to Him a woman who had been guilty of a great sin. They wanted Him to say that she ought to be stoned to death. Jesus said, "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her." Their consciences smote them, and they went out one by one. And He said unto her, "Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more." In that dark hour, near the Crucifixion, He took His disciples into the garden of Gethsemane, and asked them to watch while He went on to pray. When He returned, He found them sleeping, and all He said was, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?" He tells us that He "will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax." He compares Himself to a good shepherd, "who carries the lambs in his bosom." If any came to Him for instruction, He taught them kindly; if any with troubles and afflictions, He sympathised with them and helped them. He gave health to the sick—sight to the blind—strength to the feeble—comfort to the sorrowing—life to the dead. And what He gave was always given with kind, gentle, loving words. And even when reproof and rebuke were necessary, "the law of kindness still dwelt upon His tongue." And He is the same now; always *near to help, always able, always willing*, and *always kind in helping.—Richard Newton, D.D.: Best Things*, pp. 147–160.

Courage—Its Source and Necessity.

xli. 13. *For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, &c.*

These words were spoken to the Jews in an age of national peril and dismay; they had slowly been losing their ancient strength through a spirit of indifference, and at length the alarm had come that awoke them from their dream. The Assyrian invasion had paralysed them with fear; no sooner had they been saved from it than the prophet was commissioned to announce an invasion from Babylon that would carry them into a strange land. Then it was that Isaiah proclaimed the source of courage, the power of which he himself had proved. The Jews might seem as nothing before the great surrounding nations; but the Lord was at their side; His voice was in their midst, crying, "Fear not; I will help thee."

The words which give us the secret of the old Hebrew courage reveal the source of the courage we need as Christians. The notion, indeed, has gone forth that the ancient fortitude has no place in the life of the Christian,—it has declined before the gentler graces of spiritual life; but if this means that the Christian is to be *only* a loving, and not a righteous man, then the teaching of Christ Himself contradicts it. Not only so, but the gentler graces demand as much fortitude of soul as the stronger and sterner virtues: and, above all, steadfast obedience to God amid sorrows,

and temptations, and failures, requires a courage more deep and real than that of the Jewish warrior.

Our subject is—*Courage, its source and necessity.*

I. ITS SOURCE.

What a broad sense of the Divine presence and aid in the figure: "I will hold thy right hand!" The grasp of the hand is significant of close and present friendship; and that sense of God's presence—so near that our faith can touch His hand and hear the deep still music of His voice—realised as it may be in Christ, is the source of a courage which nothing can shake. Take the higher forms of courage seen among men, and it will be seen how this belief creates at once that state in which courage rises, and in which it attains its highest power. We may pass by animal courage—the bravery of instinct or temperament—as not proceeding from any principle, and so totally unlike courage of soul. The higher and true form of courage is of two kinds:—

1. *The courage of active resistance.* Its great element is found in the fixed survey of the means of conquest; fear rises from the contemplation of difficulties—courage from the perception of the thing to be done. There is always a lion in the path of a man who expects to find one. Intense concentration on the means of action creates the courage that actively resists danger. This is especially true of spiritual courage. It is by the aid of God that we conquer in spiritual battle; and while our gaze is fixed on that, fear vanishes; with the sense of omnipotence grasping and cheering his spirit, a man can defy the world, and death, and hell to make him turn aside from the path of Divine duty (H. E. I. 1911–1919).

2. *The courage needful for passive endurance.* It is harder of attainment; for while there is anything to be *done*, we find relief in action; but when we can only be still and endure, then it is supremely difficult to resist the assaults of cowardice. The great feature of this aspect of spiritual courage is self-surrender to the highest law of life; but if we could hear God's voice, amid the dismay and darkness, proclaiming "All is well," should we not be trustful, courageous, and strong?

II. ITS NECESSITY.

It is essential to Christian life for three reasons:—

1. It requires courage to manifest the Christian character before men (H. E. I. 1042–1046). Regarding the two sides of that character as seen in Christ—the strong and the tender, the severely true and the forbearing, sympathising, forgiving—we feel the incompleteness of any other character, and both of these aspects demand courage for their manifestation. What can give us courage to do the right regardless of consequences but the grasp of God's hand and the sound of His voice?

2. It requires courage to maintain steadfast obedience to the will of God. Christian life is more than visible Christ-like character; it means Christ-like obedience amid the inner and unseen temptations of the soul. Every man has his *own* cross to bear.

3. It demands courage to hold fast to our highest aspirations. As Christian men, we are bound to aim at being our highest and best. The revelations of our aspirations must become our practical ideals; if we do not strive to realise them, we shall degenerate. If we would gain the far-off summits, we must keep our eye fixed on the gleaming heights. And can anything give us power and courage to do so but the knowledge that the Everlasting arms are round about us, and the voice of the Eternal cheering us onward? And here, as in all the storm and strife of our earthly pilgrimage, we are simply driven to the man Christ Jesus. He knows our weakness, and left us the legacy of everlasting power when He said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."—*E. L. Hull, B.A.: Sermons*, Third Series, pp. 157-167.

The Worm and the Mountain.

xli. 14, 15. *Fear not, thou worm Jacob, &c.*

Though I have read to you only these verses, the treasury of truth upon which I intend to draw now is the whole paragraph in which they occur (vers. 10–16). In it the prophet comforts the Church by the promises wherewith he had been comforted by God. Before the captivity of God's people commences, he furnishes them with that which will cheer them while it lasts. In his prophetic vision he sees them in a prostrate and most depressed condition — like a worm trodden under foot in Babylon. But he puts before them the support of their expiring hope, in the assurance of God's favour. His argument is, that He who redeemed their fathers from Egyptian slavery would redeem them from Chaldean bondage. Mighty as their oppressors were, let them not fear; fast as their chains were riveted, let them not be dismayed; weak and defenceless as they were, let them not despair; for though the mountain threatened to crush the worm, the worm should be strengthened to thresh the mountain. The truths and promises in this paragraph are the heritage of God's people in all ages, and on them they may, and should, lay hold in every season of threatening and trouble.

I. A VERY UNEQUAL CONTEST.

The worm is called upon to thresh the mountain! Yea, not one mountain only, but many of them—"mountains." A hopeless encounter, a mad attempt! But the suggestions of sense and the reasonings of faith are widely different; "to do the greatest things and to suffer the hardest is all one to true faith." We may apply this representation variously—

1. *To the efforts needful to establish the kingdom of God in the world.* The agency intrusted with the task often seems altogether inadequate. Was it not so when Moses stood before Pharaoh, and when the power and despotism of ancient Egypt seemed ready to destroy the infant Church; when Elijah stood on Carmel, all the power of Ahab and Jezebel, their court, and the priests of Baal against him—one man against a world in arms; when the first disciples went forth to proclaim a crucified Saviour, with all the power of Judaism and all the arms and wealth of the ancient Roman empire against them; when Luther, a poor monk, challenged the Vatican, and stood solitary before the emperor and cardinals, saying, "Here stand I alone for the truth; God help me!" In each case, who would not have expected that the mountain would crush the worm! But in each case the worm prevailed. If we look at the obstacles still in the way — Heathenism, Mahometanism, Popery, Infidelity, and all the forms of vice—they seem most formidable; but the "worm" shall thresh all the mountains! The corn of the Jews was threshed by drawing over it a sharp instrument—a cart with wheels encircled with iron spikes, thus cutting the straw very small, while the corn escaped through interstices left for the purpose. As complete shall be the breaking down of all the obstacles to the Saviour's glory by the Christian Church, weak as she is in herself.

2. *To the cares and calamities of life.* We are here in a state of exile, like that of the Jews in Babylon; and we often need encouragement. The frequent repetition of the charge, "Fear not," implies that there is much to fear. The greatness of the consolation offered proves the greatness of the impending danger. Fear is incident to our nature, for we are weak creatures; to our character, for we are guilty creatures; to our condition and circumstances, for we are the suffering inhabitants of a guilty world. And though it is true

that our hopes are greater than our fears, it is equally true that our faith is never so firm as not to be exposed to waverings, and our hope is never so strong as to be altogether above distrust. The path to heaven lies through an enemy's country; it is strait, narrow, and intricate; there are many turnings, windings, and bypaths in which pilgrims may be drawn aside, and, like Christian in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, we are not always favoured with daylight. We pursue it beset by trials and afflictions, and we are often confronted by mountains of care and sorrow, of disappointment and danger. But we need not fear any of them. The worm shall thresh the mountains. See also another great promise in which great perils are implied (ch. xliii. 2).

3. *To the Christian conflict* — the struggle which the Christian has to sustain against the evil of his own heart, the seductive influences of the world, and the artifices and wiles of the powers of darkness (Eph. vi. 12; H. E. I. 1059–1062).

II. AN ANIMATING PROMISE.

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob. True, thou art a worm—weak and low in thine own eyes, small and contemptible in the eyes of others; but thou shalt be strengthened for the warfare and successful in the conflict; for I, the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, engage myself on thy side, and will be answerable for the result." In view of this promise there can be no doubt that grace, though weak, shall be victorious.

Great consolation is to be derived— 1. *From the near relation which God sustains to His people.* "Thy Redeemer," &c. 2. *From the perpetual presence of God with His Church.* "I will hold thee," &c. 3. *From the manner in which He adapts the instrumentality He employs to the end He proposes.* "I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth." 4. *From the way in which He identifies His glory with our success.*

In order to enjoy the consolation of this promise—1. There must be in us a well-founded hope of acceptance and reconciliation with God. 2. We must seek to possess the character to which this and all such promises are made. 3. We must be much in the exercise of that faith which honours God in all His attributes. 4. We must cultivate the expectation of nothing less than final triumph for the cause of God, and for the individual believer, the recipient of His mercy. The history of the past proves that this expectation is reasonable. How often the worm has threshed the mountain! The captives were delivered from their captivity. The Apostles triumphed over the Roman empire. Luther and his associates did accomplish the Reformation. That which has been is that which shall be; in the future there will be still greater victories for the Church of God.—*Samuel Thodey.*

CHEER FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD.

xli. 14–16. *Fear not, thou worm Jacob, &c.*

The first reference of these words may be to the dejected feeling of the Jews in the captivity of Babylon, and they were recorded in order to encourage them in their low condition; but to understand them as referring only to the temporal state of the Jews in Babylon and their deliverance from their captivity would be nothing better than to reduce this sublime inspired record to the level of the writings of Josephus or any other uninspired Jewish historian. The chief and the ultimate reference of the words is evidently to the condition of the spiritual Church in the various ages of the world. Taking the verses in this sense, we are led to consider—

I. THE WEAKNESS OF THE CHURCH.

"Thou worm Jacob." A worm is a weak and despised thing. 1. *The Church of God in itself is weak and helpless.* Its most useful and godly members have described themselves as

"worms" (Ps. xxii. 6). It has generally been made up of such persons as the world looked upon with contempt (1 Cor. i. 26–28.) 2. *It has always been despised by the ungodly.* The apostles of Christ were regarded by the world as "the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things," and eminently godly people have been treated thus in every age.

II. THE STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH. The weak and despised worm is to be converted into "a new, sharp, threshing instrument having teeth." The Orientals used to thresh their corn with heavy rollers with sharp iron teeth, which separated the corn from the ears, and cut the straw to be fodder for the cattle. The Church is compared here to such a powerful machine. 1. The holiness of God's people makes them strong and effective to do good (Matt. v. 16; Phil. ii. 15). 2. Their activity and devotedness make them like sharp threshing instruments. 3. Their prayers also have in all ages produced wonderful effects.

III. THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CHURCH. "Thou shalt thresh the mountains," &c. By the mountains and the hills we are to understand the sinful habits of mankind, such as their commercial frauds, their warlike dispositions, their drunkenness, their lasciviousness, &c., and all the false religions which prevail throughout the world. All these formidable obstructions are to be removed through the instrumentality of God's people.

IV. THE JOY OF THE CHURCH. "Thou shalt rejoice in the Lord," when all the mountains and the hills shall be removed and made as chaff.

1. The temporal condition of the world will be happy and glorious. 2. Its spiritual condition will be heavenly. It will then be the days of heaven upon earth. 3. And the Church will attribute all the glory to the Holy One of Israel, and not to itself.—*Thomas Rees, D.D.*

Supposed to be an interval of twelve or fourteen years between the first part of the book and that part beginning at chap. xl. The prophet is fast growing an old man. In mind he throws himself into the future, and places himself in the midst of the Jews in Babylon. He supposes their captivity to be nearing its end; but, to the heart yearning so painfully after Jerusalem, it seems without termination. To cheer them, this and the preceding chapter ring with rallying-cries, repeated again and again: "Fear not;" "Be not dismayed." The text is a remarkable assurance that though their difficulties be as "mountains," Jacob should rise and "beat them small."

I. GOD'S OWN RECOGNITION OF THE FEEBLENESS OF HIS PEOPLE. "Fear not, thou *worm* Jacob and *ye men of Israel*," or "*few men of Israel.*" It is *His* epithet, as well as flung at them by their conquerors; but it is not used in their spirit. It is only when the insect of a man struggles defiantly against his Maker that God says in ineffable contempt, "Let the potsherds," &c. This is a pitiful remembrance of their weakness. Illustrates His infinite condescension. In deigning to ally Himself to men, in inviting us to share His thoughts and counsels, He has not *overrated* the worth of the creature He receives to such high dignity. Marvellous that He who has in His majesty and glory from everlasting stood alone, and must be for ever the solitary God, without an equal in His universe, welcomes to His heart those who are impotent as a "*worm*" (Job xxv. 5, 6).

II. GOD'S RECOGNITION OF THE HUGE DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF HIS PEOPLE. He speaks of them as "*mountains*," "*hills.*" Babylon, with its strong walls, vast army, the desert reaching away weary miles between His people and their country; all is gauged exactly. For them to try and overcome would be like a worm attempting to attack the mountains.

III. CONSIDER THE "WORM" AS THE "MOUNTAIN THRESHER."

"Thou shalt thresh the mountains," &c. In the previous chapter God is represented leading His people in their victorious march through the wilderness. A way was to be prepared that He might march right royally before His people (Isa. xl. 3–5). See the instance of Semiramis on her march to Ecbatanæ.

Behold the worm attempting the impossible and accomplishing it! The handful of Israelites were omnipotent with Jehovah at their back. Invested with God's strength, the "worm" should conquer all difficulties.

The main idea is the *completeness* of the conquest of hindrances. No words better convey a conception of the thoroughness with which the work should be done: "Mountains threshed small" and "hills made as chaff." 1. The application of this promise to the *followers of Christ personally.* The Christian is to be a "mountain thresher" in his own heart and life. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." 2. Its application to *Christian labour in general.* This promise is the inspiration of the Church in what the world deems idiotic tasks affecting the conversion of the heathen. Sin is not always to be the "mountain." "A new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" are to arise. You cannot crush goodness out of the world now. (See the failure of Julian, Voltaire, and others.) 3. The application of this promise to any *particular neighbourhood.* God is jealous of the mountain Sin rising everywhere. If there is any piety in any given locality, though it is as insignificant as a "worm," it is strong enough with God to save that neighbourhood.—*S. Shrimpton.*

Consolation for the Desponding.

xli. 17. *When the poor and needy seek water, &c.*

I. In what extremities God here promises to help His people.

1. *In case of outward want.* This is a trying exercise to many, though little understood by those who have all things richly to enjoy. It is compared to an armed man carrying tribulation and terror in his looks (Prov. vi. 11). The body is an essential part of our constitution, and hath wants of its own, numerous and urgent, and to have little or nothing to answer its cravings in a severe trial. But God can easily help us *in* such a trial, and *out* of it. Examples: Hagar (Gen. xxi. 15–19); the widow (1 Kings xvii. 12–16). There is no exigency of man beyond the power of God. Though creature succours fail, and all the cisterns of earth should be dried up, there is enough in God to support our faith (Hab. iii. 17, 18).

2. *In case of inward trouble and distress from sin.* This is still more grievous and insupportable. Though most men think that if they had nothing but sin to trouble them they could be happy, some know that one sin set home upon the conscience by the Spirit of God is a terrible experience (Ps. xxxviii. 3, 4; H. E. I. 1334–1341). But when the poor soul is ready to give up all for God, God comes to His relief (Ps. xxxi. 22). In the Gospel He has provided a sovereign cure for the wounded spirit (Ps. cxxx 3–5).

3. *In the case of approaching death.* A trial from which there is no escape. Is often very terrible. Yet even here God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. By His presence He not only reconciles us to dying, but makes us wish for it, makes us smile at it, makes us triumph over it (1 Cor. xv. 57). Though death be a king with respect to *us*, he is but God's servant, and entirely at His command; he comes to us only *when* and *as* God pleases. And God knows how to support and comfort while His servant is taking down the earthly house of flesh (H. E. I. 1642, 1643).

I have witnessed only these three cases, but you may apply it to every

distress. Whenever the poor and needy cry for help, God engages to hear them. In their misery there is a silent and affecting voice which hath great power with God, and poverty venting itself in prayer hath an amazing force (Ps. cvi. 44).

II. WHY HE HAS MADE THIS GRACIOUS PROMISE.

1. *For the glory of His own perfections* (Ps. vii. 15). It is for the honour of His *wisdom* that He knows how to bring help when the skill and contrivance of all His creatures is nonplussed; of His *power*, that He is able to deliver the godly out of temptation when the ability of second causes cannot accomplish it; of His *mercy and free grace*, to afford help when the poor creature is in the worst and least deserving condition. Should God favour us only when we are in prosperity, and there is no difficulty in the way, His hand would not be so visible, nor His perfections so glorious; but to help the poor and needy, and that, too, in their greatest straits and necessities, declares His superlative goodness and excellency, that He can and will do what none else can. He therefore chooses such seemingly desperate cases to appear in, for the manifestation of His own glory (Deut. xxxii. 36–39).

2. *Because of the special relation God has to the poor and needy.* They that are most neglected and forsaken by men are nearest to God and more particularly taken care of (Ps. lxviii. 5). "The poor committeth himself to Thee" (Ps. x. 14). But will He stand to their choice and act for them? *Yes* (Ps. xii. 5). Which of you, being a father retaining the affections of a parent, if you saw a child in distress, would sit by and take no notice of it? Would you go out of the room and think no more about it? No! You would rather seem fonder of that child than of all the rest, and be more tender of it than ever. So will your Heavenly Father have a special regard to His poor and needy children when they seek water and there is none (ch. lxiii. 8, 9).

III. WHAT WE ARE TO DO WITH THIS PROMISE.

1. *Let us praise God for making it to us.* What amazing condescension that there should ever be any such thing as a promise from God to His creatures! Will earthly kings thus voluntarily bring themselves under obligation to their subjects? But with a kindness and generosity peculiar to Himself, God makes a covenant with His people, by which He binds Himself in the most solemn manner to be a Father to them, that is, to be watchful and tender to them, and keep them from all evil, and to withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly.

2. *In the time of affliction let us plead this promise in prayer*, for that is the surest and speediest way of procuring relief. It may be the design of God, in blasting earthly comforts, to drive us to our knees. By bringing us into trouble, and showing us the insufficiency of creatures to help us, He may intend to lead our thoughts up to Himself, the fountain of living waters (Ps. cxlii. 4, 5; H. E. I. 69).

3. *However great and prolonged our affliction may be, let us not look upon this promise with doubt or distrust.* It is God's promise; and having passed His word, we must be infidels if we doubt the performance (Numb. xxiii. 19). To doubt the accomplishment of anything He hath engaged for were to question His *wisdom* in promising what He had not properly considered; or His *love*, as if He would not be as good as His word; or His *power*, as if He had promised more than He was able to perform. An affront this which even a man who values his character would highly resent. Let us take care, then, how we offer it to God.—*Samuel Lavington: Sermons, Supplementary Volume*, pp. 414–432.

In its primary sense, the text is an encouragement to the Jews to trust in God; in its spiritual meaning it extends to the Church of God in all ages. It describes—

I. A DISTRESSING CASE.

1. The people of God are often in a low and afflicted state. All men, if they knew it, are poor and needy; but very many think themselves "rich and increased with goods." "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up." *Soul* and *goods;* as if the soul had tongue and teeth! God's people *feel* their poverty and need. 2. They strive after holiness and comfort. Water, as cleansing and refreshing, may be understood to mean holiness and comfort. They long to be delivered from the body of sin and death; they desire to walk in the light of God's countenance. They try hard for these; but, 3. They often seem to labour in vain; they "seek water, and find none." They strive for victory, but the conflict remains; deadness and darkness return upon them. 4. They become dejected; "their tongue faileth," &c. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." They turn faint, like disappointed travellers on the outlook for water; they begin to lose confidence in God (Ps. xlii. 1, 2, 3, 9, lxxxviii. 14).

II. FITTING CONSOLATION.

1. In the words used about God. God is "the Lord," *i.e.*, JEHOVAH, the Eternal, Immutable, "will hear them;" He is "the God of Israel, ELOHIM, the Mighty One, with whom nothing is impossible. 2. In the promises made. "I will hear." Let them be encouraged to continue in prayer. "I will not forsake them." Have courage, then, fainting soul! 3. Those who continue trusting shall certainly be consoled (ver. 18; Ps. xxxiv. 6, xxx. 8–11).

APPLICATION.—1. Most men know but little of spiritual troubles. These are not to be envied. Let them seek to know their spiritual wants and obey Christ's gracious invitation (John vii. 37, 38; Rev. xxii. 17). 2. Let those who are fainting under their troubles believe that none ever waited upon God in vain. From these promises, as from wells of salvation, you may draw water with joy (Ps. xxxvi. 8, xvi. 11).—*C. Simeon, M.A.: Skeletons*, pp. 318–321).

The poor and needy must ever command the sympathy of those more favourably situated. They will probably never cease to exist. The text primarily encourages the captive Jews in Babylon. But it also represents all human need and Divine help.

I. THE EXIGENCY.

"The poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth them for thirst." It is the dryness of the sandy desert which produces distressing thirst. The traveller seeks water in vain. His throat becomes dry; his tongue is disinclined to speech; he sees only a miserable death before him. It is a picture of suffering, destitution, and necessity.

The distress may arise from external causes, as bodily disease or pecuniary privation. Or it may be entirely in the mind. All suffering is really there. It is a matter of personal consciousness. The onlooker may see no adequate cause. Yet the sufferer feels. You look at the outside of a splendid house, and it seems to you that no deep sorrow can be there. Yet within there may be anxieties and cares which make the owner indifferent to his splendid surroundings; and in many cases there is biting poverty and want which cannot be revealed.

The temptations of such a time are serious (Job i. 9, ii. 9). 1. *Impatience.* The sufferer does not readily submit to his impoverishment. His spirit may be that which says, "Not Thy will, but mine be done," rather than the Saviour's prayer in Gethsemane. 2. *Complaining.* When privation presses we are tempted to assume that we are wiser than our Father, and therefore to withdraw our trust and criticise His plans. 3. *Despair.* And when faith and hope are displaced by despair, there will be *prayerlessness.* We shall ask, "What profit shall we have if we pray unto Him?" There will be *sinfulness.* Many plunge into sin to rid themselves of care. There will be *recklessness.* The temptation is to say, "Things cannot be worse, and can never be better, therefore we may as well lie down and discontinue effort." Some

imagine they escape by terminating their lives.

II. THE CRY.

Better than yielding to such temptation is to cry to the Lord when poverty and sorrow appear. It is here supposed that God's people do so. It is their privilege and duty to lay all their sorrows before Him and to leave them with Him, as children entirely dependent on their fathers (H. E. I. 176–178).

III. THE PROMISE.

Two things are promised. 1. *Divine attentiveness.* He is not unmindful, even though He may seem so. He listens for and listens to the cry of distress. "I, the Lord, will hear them." He heard Hagar in the wilderness (Gen. xxi. 17). He heard Israel in Egypt (Exod. iii. 7). He heard Hezekiah when he spread forth Sennacherib's letter, and when he was sick. He is the hearer of prayer. Thousands of testimonies to this. Your own experience attests it. Can you not say with the Psalmist (Ps. cxvi. 1–5)? 2. *Divine helpfulness.* "I, the God of Jacob, will not forsake them" (Heb. xiii. 5, 6). Sad indeed to be forsaken by a friend when trouble and poverty come. God does not forsake. His *love* is a guarantee. He is the God of Israel. He is our Father in Christ. He is interested in us. His *faithfulness* is a guarantee. He has bound Himself by the word of promise. Contrary to His nature to fail. His *power* is a guarantee. "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" Unbelief says it is impossible to overcome this difficulty. But He provided manna in the wilderness and brought water out of the smitten rock. Often by the most unlikely means and in the most unlikely places (ver. 18). "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THIS PRECIOUS PROMISE.

1. There may be some one here who is passing through a season of affliction. God's children sometimes seem to suffer more than others. You need a message that may help to lift up your drooping spirit. Satan may be pressing his advantage through the depression your trouble has caused. Listen to the declaration of the text. Fall back on the simple representations of the Bible. Repair more confidently to the Lord for help. 2. There may be some one to whom this subject applies as to his spiritual impoverishment and necessity. You have recently discovered that you are spiritually poor. Like a merchant who has imagined that he was accumulating a princely fortune, but who makes the discovery that he is insolvent, you have found out that you are a ruined sinner. But you are not content to perish. Your tongue faileth for thirst. You desire salvation. Now, the Lord pities you in your low estate. He has opened a fountain in the wilderness. Jesus died. In His perfect righteousness, His atoning blood, and His quickening Spirit there is all you need. If you seek your restoration in Him, you cannot be disappointed. If your soul is impoverished, go to His fulness. He invites you. His compassionate love ever looks down on weary and footsore and thirsty travellers in the wilderness of this world, with infinite readiness to supply their wants (Isa. lv. 1, 2; Rev. xxii. 17).—*J. Rawlinson.*

GOD'S PROMISE TO THE POOR AND NEEDY.

xli. 17, 18. *When the poor and needy seek water, &c.*

In verse 8 the Lord is declaring the relation in which He stands to His people Israel, and then He proceeds to encourage His people in the prospect of trial and difficulty by an assurance of His presence to strengthen and support them (vers. 10, 14, 15) The Lord's people are in themselves but feeble; but in the power of God they shall triumph over their most formidable enemies; as a consequence of their triumph they shall "rejoice

in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel." Then follows the encouraging language of the text. Consider—

I. WHO ARE MEANT BY THE "POOR AND NEEDY." Not those who are poor and needy in a temporal sense, but in a *spiritual*,—those who feel themselves to be so in a spiritual sense.

1. The life of the Christian may be compared to a waste and barren wilderness leading from this world to that which is to come. In their journey, the Lord's people often feel themselves to be "poor and needy," without the cheering presence of their God, destitute of the usual manifestations of His love and the consolations of His Spirit. Water is an emblem frequently employed in Scripture to represent Divine influences, which refresh, gladden, and cleanse the soul, as water does the body. The children of God are sometimes reduced to straits; they seek water, and there is none, and "their tongue faileth for thirst." They realise the feeling of David (Ps. xlii. 1, 2).

2. The Lord's believing people may be represented as "poor and needy" when they are anxiously desirous of larger measures of grace and knowledge, increasing holiness and spirituality of mind, more complete superiority to the world with the affections and lusts of the flesh, and a growing conformity to the precepts of the Gospel. Here is the difference between nominal and real Christianity, between the religion of form and outward appearance, and the religion of power and inward experience; between a dead and a living faith. It is impossible to *stand still* in religion.

II. THE CONSOLATORY PROMISE AFFORDED IN THE TEXT. The Lord assures His people that they shall not be disappointed in the objects of their desire: in their extremity of distress, and when they are almost without hope, He will hear their cry.

1. Prayer, that is, the earnest expression of the desires of the heart, shall never be offered up in vain. He *can* and *will* do for His own "far more abundantly than they can either ask or think."

2. He is represented as the "God of Israel." Israel was taken into covenant relationship with Him; and on condition of their obedience, He engaged to favour them with His constant presence, to preserve them in danger, to protect them from their enemies, and at length to put them in full and undisputed possession of the earthly Canaan. And so it is with the spiritual Israel of God. They stand in covenant relationship with Him as their "reconciled Father in Christ Jesus."

III. WHAT ENCOURAGEMENT THERE IS HERE TO PRAYER! God is a God of faithfulness and truth; He will not turn a deaf ear to the supplications of His obedient people (Ps. l. 15; Matt. vii. 7). The history of the saints in all ages will bear testimony to the truth of that Scripture, "He giveth power to the faint," &c. (xl. 29, 31). Prayer to God, therefore, is, under all circumtances, a great and solemn duty (Luke xviii. 1; Phil. iv. 6; 1 Thess. v. 17).

CONCLUSION.—1. *To the unconcerned about the blesssings of salvation.* (1.) Men can be active enough in the prosecution of their worldly schemes of gain, honour, or advantage; they will take any trouble and submit to any sacrifice; but it is usually quite otherwise in the vastly important business of religion; here all is coldness, apathy, and indifference. But "I say unto you, labour not for the meat which perisheth," &c. (Matt. vi. 33; Mark viii. 36; Luke x. 42; Acts iii. 19). (2.) Ignorance of *spiritual* troubles and necessities is by no means desirable. The pathway to Zion is not always cheered by the sunshine of hope and joy; cloud and tempest will sometimes rest upon it (Acts xiv. 22). If real religion has its peculiar joys, it is not without its peculiar sorrows.

2. *To those who are fainting for want of Divine consolations.* Remember, and take encouragement from the thought, that "all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus" (Heb. x. 23, xiii. 5; Isa. xlix. 15, 16).—*Charles*

Rawlings, B.A. · *The Pulpit*, vol. xlix. pp. 181–184.

The redemption of our souls is precious; it originated alike in our extreme misery and in God's great mercy (lix. 16). But even the people of God are often reduced to dreadful straits. The ultimate perfection of their natures and the unbounded felicity of their future state are the objects of their firm and delightful hope; but the same Book which reveals what is laid up for them teaches them to expect various troubles and trials by the way (Acts xiv. 22). Yet under all their troubles they shall be well supported; all their wants well supplied. Isaiah received a commission to minister to the consolation of the saints (ch. xl. 1). The text alone is sufficient to elevate the souls of true believers with good hope and everlasting consolation.

I. THE ACCOUNT HERE GIVEN OF THOSE TO WHOM THE PROMISE IS MADE.

1. *Their exigencies are very great.* They are poor and needy, and even in want of water. Many of the saints of God have been literally poor. Even when the Lord had brought the seed of Jacob where, generally speaking, "there was no lack of anything," it was still His sovereign pleasure that, in the midst of abundance, some should be in want (Deut. xv. 11). During the captivity in Babylon the number of such persons must have greatly increased. Under the Christian dispensation, poverty has ever been the lot of many who are dear in God's sight (James ii. 5; 1 Cor. i. 26–29; Luke iv. 18, vii. 22; Mark xii. 37, &c.) All the "rich in faith" are still, in one sense, poor, because completely dependent. Knowing and feeling this, they are "poor in spirit." Unlike the self-righteous Laodiceans, who boasted of being "rich," they are ever ready to acknowledge that they are in themselves "wretched and miserable and poor," &c. (Rev. iii. 17). To begin with, they found themselves in want of the most essential spiritual blessings; and afterwards, in proportion as they even partially forsook "the fountain of living waters," their spiritual necessities became great.

2. *Their consequent sufferings are very distressing.* The evils of extreme poverty are great, though God supports His people under them, and gives the sanctified use of them. The people of God are not unfrequently subjected to the severest troubles of a temporal kind (Heb. xi. 37, 38, xii. 6, 11).

3. *They earnestly desire and endeavour to obtain relief.* They *seek* water; they cry to the Lord to give it. They who will not work when it is necessary cannot expect to eat when their wants are great. Spiritual supplies are, in every sense, the gift of God; but they are promised only to such as earnestly desire and diligently seek them from Him (chap. lv. 1–3). The case, indeed, appears pitiable, when bread and water are sought and *there is none;* but faith is only thus put to the test. God has pledged His faithfulness for your ultimate success.

II. THE PROMISE GIVEN FOR THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT. "I, the Lord," &c. What is the import of this promise? It implies--

1. *Great compassion and kindness on the part of the Promise-maker.* How tender are His words! Truly in Him compassions flow (Exod. xxxiv. 6; Jer. xxxi. 20; Hos. xi. 8, 9). Not only does He forbear to destroy His people, but He returns to pardon their sins and to load them with benefits (lxviii. 9; 1 John iv. 10; Rom. viii. 32).

2. *That the prayers of God's people are heard and accepted.* "I, the Lord, will hear" (cf. chap. lxvi. 2). One of His names is the Hearer of prayer (Ps. lxv. 2); all who seek shall find (ch. xlv. 19); as certainly as they pray shall they be heard (ch. lviii. 9); He says yet more (ch. lxv. 24).

3. *That all their wants shall be supplied.* What else can be meant by the promise, "I the Lord will hear"? (Ps. cvii. 6, xxxvii. 19; John xiv. 13; Phil. iv. 19). Can anything be too hard for the Lord? He is the God of Israel, who has pledged Himself, both

by His covenanted love and faithfulness greatly to bless His people (1 John iii. 1; Heb. x. 23; 1 Sam. xv. 29).

4. *That the Lord will be immutably gracious to His people.* "I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them" (1 Sam. xii. 22; Heb. xiii. 5; Isa. xlii. 16).

CONCLUSION. — 1. Let not the people of God be discouraged and impatient, though their circumstances be low and their distresses great. 2. Let all their trust be in the Lord (ch. xxvi. 4). 3. Let them distinguish themselves as a praying people (Ps. lxii. 8; John vi. 68). 4. Let them walk worthy of His kindness (1 Cor. xv. 58). 5. Let sinners see their misery and their hope (ch. xxix. 8; Rev. xxii. 17).—*Adam Thompson, D.D.: Outlines*, pp. 214–220.

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD.

xlii. 1–11. *Behold My servant, &c.*

It is difficult for us who have history, with all its definiteness, to realise the inestimable value of prophecy, notwithstanding its vagueness, to God's ancient people. But try to put yourself in their place. It was very difficult for them to *be* God's people, because it is difficult always to be loyal to an unpopular and apparently hopeless cause. How small was the true Israel! a little speck of light surrounded by a vast continent of darkness. The thought that that darkness would ever be dispelled seemed a vain dream. Besides, there was the terribly depressing influence of the apparent failure of all previous efforts to dispel it. The Law appeared to have been given in vain, kings and prophets raised up to no purpose. In spite of all that the most faithful of them had accomplished, the vast mass even of the chosen people were given over to iniquity, and over all the other nations there brooded gross darkness, the very shadow of death. Idolatry with all its abominations prevailed the whole world over. How, then, could any man reasonably hope that the earth should ever be "full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"? It was contrary to reason to cherish this hope; but yet God's little band of faithful people did cherish it. In this they were mightily helped by prophecy. The confident assurances of the prophets enabled them to look beyond the things that were seen and temporal, to those that were unseen but eternal. So they walked by faith, not by sight, and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.

Chief among the predictions that were thus helpful to them was that of a Messiah—an Anointed One—who should triumphantly accomplish all the purposes of God in regard to this earth. In this particular prophecy He was held up before them as the "*Servant*" of God. This was a phrase with which they were familiar. By other discourses of Isaiah, they had been taught to regard themselves—their nation—as called to be the servant of God—the instrumentality by which the knowledge of God was to be diffused throughout the earth and men everywhere won to His service (ch. xli. 8, 9). This was in accordance with the terms of the covenant into which God had originally entered with them (Exod. xix. 6). A glorious calling, but how poorly had they responded to it! But now they were taught to look for One who should be all that they ought to have been, and accomplish all that they ought to have accomplished.

This prediction they would study with minutest care, and as they did so they would think much and often of such points as these:—

I. THE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS "SERVANT OF GOD."

This much would be clear to them—1. That His character would be more

than blameless; that all conceivable moral and spiritual excellences would meet in it. "In whom My soul *delighteth.*"

2. That He would be unostentatious, thus differing wonderfully from all earthly conquerors (ver. 2).

3. That He would be gentle (ver. 3).

4. Yet that this gentleness would not arise from weakness. He Himself would never be broken nor extinguished; over all opposition He would triumph.

We, who have history to guide us, know how wonderfully all these predictions have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

II. HIS MISSION.

1. He was to be the maker of a new covenant with God's ancient people (ver. 6), that "new covenant" of which other prophets wrote and spoke (Jer. xxxi. 31–34).

2. He was to be "a light of the Gentiles." He was to dispel the darkness that brooded over them by bringing "judgment," *i.e.*, true religion, to them. The effects of the accomplishment of His mission are set forth in beautiful figures in verse 7. How blessed and glorious the task assigned to this Servant of the Lord!

III. THE MANNER IN WHICH HE WOULD ACCOMPLISH IT.

His conquests were not to be accomplished as earthly conquests had been. 1. His progress was not to be violent or clamorous (ver. 2). He was to conquer by simply doing what was right and speaking what was true (Matt. xiii. 14–21; John xviii. 36, 37). The kingdom of God cannot be extended by legal enactments or force of arms.

2. His triumphs were to be advanced by strengthening what was bruised and fainting. Here history comes to the help of the students of prophecy; it is by His gentle treatment of His feeble followers that our Lord has made them strong, and so made His Church a power in the earth (H. E. I. 951; P.D. 474).

3. His triumphs were to be secured by unwearied perseverance (ver. 4).

IV. THE GUARANTEES THAT IN THIS MISSION HE WOULD SUCCEED.

1. He would not undertake it in His own strength (vers. 1, 6).

2. He who had called Him to it was no other than the Almighty (ver. 5).

3. The mission which He had undertaken was one that this Almighty Creator could not fail to sympathise with (ver. 8).

V. THE REASON ASSIGNED WHY THEY SHOULD TRUST IN THIS GLOWING PREDICTION (ver. 9).

This promise was made by Him who had fulfilled His former promises: in this He would not fail.

These were the hopes and expectations which sustained God's ancient people, and we may derive comfort from them to-day. Christ's triumphs are incomplete. Much remains to be accomplished; so much, that we sometimes doubt whether it can be accomplished. But these doubts are condemned—1. by history; 2. by God's Word. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ.—*M. N.*

I. THE PERSON HERE REFERRED TO. "*The Servant of the Lord.*" Who is intended by that phrase? Some have answered, Cyrus, because there is an undeniable reference to him in the beginning of the 41st chapter, where he is spoken of as "the righteous man from the east." But the allusion cannot be to Cyrus here, for he was far from answering to the description given in verses 2, 3: his sternness and severity are inconsistent with tenderness. Others allege that the prophet means himself. But how was "he a light to lighten the Gentiles"? And may we not presume that the phrase here designates the same person as in the other places in which it is employed, in many of which it is clearly impossible to hold that it describes Isaiah? Others think that it means Israel: but this servant was to be given "for a covenant of the people," and, therefore, he must be distinct from the people. In a sense, indeed, the true spiritual

Israel are one with Jesus, and they may be regarded as identified. This is the view of Alexander. But even in this view the passage must be taken *first* of Him, and is true of them only through their union to Him. So we adopt the view that this passage is purely Messianic,—a view which is adopted even by some eminent Jewish interpreters, and which has the sanction of Matt. xii. 17–21. When, therefore, the question is put, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this—of himself, or of some other man?" we answer without any hesitation, of Jesus who is called Christ.

II. THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN OF HIM.

This is comprised in verses 1–4. He is the beloved and the chosen of God, and to this prediction corresponds the declaration at the baptism of Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He is endued with the Spirit of God, and to this answers the descent of the Holy Ghost on Jesus as He came up from Jordan (Acts x. 38). It is added, "He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles," which means that He should set up or establish His religion among the Gentiles, and for that the way was prepared in His death and resurrection, and by His great commission to His followers. But the most interesting part of this description is that which follows, and which brings out the humility and tenderness of Jesus (ver. 2). There was nothing of the love of ostentation about Him. Unlike the Pharisees of His time. When they did anything they supposed to be meritorious, they sounded a trumpet before them. He left His works to speak for themselves. Nay, even sometimes, when He saw that they were not moved by a proper spirit, He forbade those who had been benefited by His miracles from blazing abroad a report concerning them. He said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." And the whole system of getting up attractions of a factitious character to herald the preaching of the Gospel is out of harmony with His spirit and example. If crowds came after Him, that was an effect of something they had seen in Him, or received from Him. They were not collected by any flourish of trumpets which He caused to be sounded before Him. Few things in these days would do more good in the Churches than the study and imitation of this feature of the Redeemer's character.

Akin to this humility is the tenderness here described. How beautiful the words, "A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench!" In the shepherd's pipe, if a reed be bruised it gives forth a false note, and the player forthwith takes it out, breaks it, and throws it away. In the lamp, if the wick has gone out it emits an evil odour, and the attendant utterly extinguishes it. But not so with Jesus. That which others would reject as useless, He will endeavour to save (P. D. 475). He will receive even the outcasts, whom the world itself would throw away, and make of them trophies of His grace. We see this illustrated in the Gospel: in His treatment of the most degraded class of sinners (Luke vii. 36–50; John viii. 1–11; John iv. 7–28). In His reception of those who came inquiringly to Him (John iii. 1–17; Mark x. 17–22; Mark xii. 28–34). In His dealings with the weak in faith (Mark v. 25–34); and in His reception of the backsliding, of which the case of Peter is a conspicuous illustration.

Verse 4 is a prediction of the universal diffusion of the Gospel which yet awaits its complete fulfilment. Meanwhile, as Christ does not fail and is not discouraged by the delay, why should we?

III. THE COMMISSION HERE GIVEN HIM.

This commission is issued by the Lord God (ver. 5). Behold the monotheism which so distinguished the literature of Judaism from that of other systems! This Jehovah has called Messiah "in righteousness," or for a righteous purpose, or in such a way as shall at once manifest and promote righteousness. And the ultimate design is to fulfil His covenant with His

people and bless the Gentiles. In doing that He will, by His Spirit, enlighten men in the knowledge of things concerning which they were formerly in the dark, and give them a nobler liberty than they had ever enjoyed, namely, freedom from the slavery of sin. And the result of all this would be an advancement of happiness, so that the people should sing a new song unto the Lord, and His praise should fill the earth. Could anything better describe the effect of the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles at the first, or the results which follow, even in our days, the labours of faithful missionaries among the heathen?

LESSONS. — 1. *If Christ needed the Spirit of the Lord upon Him, how much more do we?* Let us supplicate God to put His Spirit upon us, that we may do His work in His way, and with the greatest possible success. 2. *If Christ does not manifest ostentation, why should we?* He who seeks to make himself or any particular feature of his own character prominent, thereby proves that he has not the Spirit of Christ. The wish to make a sensation is one thing; the desire to serve our generation by the will of God is quite another. 3. *If Christ, who is all purity, could be gentle with the erring, why should not we?* He did not sin, and, therefore, made no demand upon the charity of others; but we are always needing that others shall be tender with us; and, therefore, we ought to be all the more gentle with others.

"Forget not thou hast often sinned,
And sinful yet must be;
Deal gently with the erring one,
As thy God hath dealt with thee."
—*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*

THE FATHER'S ELECT SERVANT.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

xlii. i. 4. *Behold My Servant, &c.*

These words belong to one of the most impressive portions of the prophetic Scriptures, and unquestionably relate to the character and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. This might be argued with sufficient certainty from the internal evidence of the passage itself; but it is expressly affirmed, moreover, by an inspired expositor (Matt. xii. 17–21). Our text is descriptive of *the whole work and administration of the Messiah.* It calls us to *behold*, with admiring attention—

I. THE MESSIAH'S OFFICIAL CHARACTER AND QUALIFICATIONS.

1. Our blessed Saviour is the Father's *Servant.* It is entirely in reference to His mediatorial work that our Lord is denominated the Father's Servant (ch. lii. 13, liii. 11, xlix. 6). In His divine nature, as the SON, He possesses, from eternity to eternity, an essential equality with the FATHER. But, for the purpose of recovering our fallen race to holiness and happiness, and of re-establishing that divine dominion over man which sin had subverted, He laid His glory by, and sustains the character of a servant to Him who sent Him (Phil. ii. 6, 7; Heb. x. 7). Nor was it only in His mediatorial *humiliation* that He acknowledged the Father's will and conducted Himself as a servant. He does so now in His mediatorial *exaltation.* That exaltation He enjoys as the recompense of His acts and services of filial submission and zeal (H. E. I. 919); and He administers His kingdom with a view to the glory of the Father, to whom He will ultimately resign it, that God may be all in all (Phil. ii. 9–11; 1 Cor. xv. 27, 28; H. E. I. 985).

2. Our Redeemer is the Father's *Elect*—called of God to the mediatorial office (Heb. v. 4–6). In Him alone did God behold the attributes and perfections indispensable for the work of salvation. (1.) None but a divine person could, as the great prophet of

the Lord, manifest the Father's name to a world which had not known Him (John i. 18; H. E. I. 847–848). (2.) He was ordained to offer a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the world, and to present effectual intercession for as many as should come unto God by Him. The merit and prevalency of these acts depended materially on the spotless purity and infinite dignity of the sacrifice which was to be offered, and of the Priest who was to intercede (Heb. vii. 26–28). (3.) The government was to be on the shoulders of the Messiah. He was to undertake the administration of a spiritual kingdom which requires for the proper transaction of its vast and immensely complicated concerns a wisdom and energy such as no creature can exert. On all these accounts, when the servant was to be chosen to whom the business of salvation was to be intrusted, the elect must needs be the FELLOW OF JEHOVAH.

3. The Divine Person thus and for these purposes chosen by the Father appeared in the form of a servant, by assuming human nature into an ineffable union with the divine nature which belonged to Him from eternity. To qualify that human nature for the momentous duties which the office of Mediator involved, it was made the subject of an unexampled and peculiar anointing from the Holy One: "I have put my spirit upon Him" (cf. ch. xi. 1, 2, lxvi. 1–3; and Luke iv. 17–21; John iii. 24; Heb. i. 8, 9). From all these texts we learn that there were certain qualifications of our Lord's human nature as essential, in their place and measure, to His success, as the higher attributes which belonged to the divine nature; and that these qualifications were not supplied to the humanity directly and immediately by the simple fact of its personal union with the divinity, but *mediately* by the unction of the Holy Spirit (Acts x. 38). (α)

4. Thus chosen and qualified for the service of God, in the discharge of His functions He is *upheld* by His Divine Father. (1.) This may refer partly to the personal succours afforded to our Lord in the course of His life and ministry on earth at seasons of peculiar emergency and trial (Matt. iv. 11; Luke xxii. 43). (2.) But it more especially refers to the divine supports afforded to our Redeemer in His mediatorial administration and government. Every dispensation of Providence toward individuals and nations is arranged in entire subserviency to the great purposes for which Christ lived, died, and rose again. So that while *He* is the Father's Servant, all are *His* servants (Eph. i. 20–22). (3.) This expression also intimates the high sanction and supreme authority of Jesus Christ. From His teaching and administration, though He be a servant, there is no appeal to the Father who employs Him. God will for ever uphold, and in no one case, nor on any account whatsoever, will He counteract or alter the measures of His Son's government (John v. 22, 23). Let this teach us how seriously and carefully we ought to study the will of Christ.

5. He is also *acceptable and approved*; one in whom the Father's soul delighteth. (1.) This delight has respect, generally, to Christ Himself, as the Agent of redemption (John v. 20; Matt. xvii. 5). (2.) It has a particular respect to the sacrifice of atonement made by the death of Christ for guilty man (John x. 17; Eph. v. 2). (3.) It has a reference to the Mediator in His present character and operations as the Head of the Church, and the Agent by whom the plans for its gradual enlargement and ultimate perfection are constantly superintended, and shall be brought in due season to a prosperous issue. The salvation of man by Jesus Christ is the concern which is nearest and dearest to His heart, and in the process and consummation of which He takes the highest pleasure.

From the view now taken of the official character of our Saviour we may derive instruction in reference to all Christian ministers and missionaries. He that will as such be God's servant

must, like the Mediator Himself, be able to allege God's choice and call of him to that office (John xv. 16). Upon all God's chosen servants Christ is ready to put the same Spirit of power and holiness which the text describes the Father as having put upon *Him*. For such full baptism of that Spirit, let them apply in prayer and faith. Many other qualifications for their work are desirable, but this is indispensable. Having that, let them be thankful for the high honour God has conferred upon them in putting them into the ministerial office, mindful of its momentous responsibilities, careful to do God's will faithfully, diligently, and heartily, and, like their great Pattern, be so intent on their Master's work and glory, as never to allow any selfish interest or gratification to interfere for one moment with their ministerial duties. Such men will be upheld in their work by divine grace and providence; and God will smile with acceptance on their labours of love. Thus, in truth, He in one respect accomplishes the promise made in the text to the Mediator Himself.

To the Church of Christ our text speaks the language of instruction in righteousness. It reminds us of our duty to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth such labourers into His harvest.

II. THE WORK FOR WHICH MESSIAH HAS RECEIVED THIS OFFICIAL CHARACTER AND QUALIFICATION.

"He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles"—a prediction of the illumination and conversion of heathen tribes. Great privileges were once granted to the Jews exclusively (Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20); now privileges still greater are extended to benighted nations. By "judgment" we are here to understand—

1. *A direct, well-attested, and solemnly obligatory revelation of the will of God as to the salvation and duty of man* (Ps. cxix. 13, xix. 9–11; Isa. li. 4). Revealed truth and precepts are called "judgment," because they contain not only light, but law; not only a rule, but a decision. They are the standard by which we ought to judge ourselves, and by which we shall infallibly be judged of the Lord. When once brought or published to us, they become *ipso facto* binding on us, and demand our instant acquiescence and obedience. This view of revelation, so admonitory to ourselves, also evinces the propriety of its being communicated to those nations that are unacquainted with it. They need it. Nothing else can root out their inveterate errors, and settle their otherwise interminable disputations.

2. *That dispensation of power which accompanies the publication of the Gospel.* (1.) Christianity is not only a system of law, but of soul-subduing grace (Ps. xix. 7). This energy "brings forth judgment unto truth"—obtains in the hearts of men a sentence in favour of the truth, induces them to become obedient to it, and thus gains for it a glorious victory. (2.) The power of Christ which accompanies the Gospel extends also to the restraining of Satan, and to the special counteraction of his agency and influence (John xii. 31; Luke x. 18, 19).

How interesting and important is the work of Jesus Christ as the Illuminator and Deliverer of immortal men! What true philanthropist can be indifferent to it?

III. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE MESSIAH EXECUTES HIS TASK.

Verses 2, 3 teach us that in the exercise of His functions our Saviour was to be—

1. *Humble and unostentatious.* It was in connection with an instance of our Lord's aversion to pomp, noise, and parade, and His readiness to sacrifice His personal credit to the great interests of His public mission, that St. Matthew quotes our text (Matt. xii. 15–21).

2. *Peaceable and inoffensive.* The kingdom which He administered was opposed "not to Cæsar's, but to Satan's empire;" and therefore He submitted in all civil affairs to the government of His country, discountenanced all schemes of ambition and violence, and abstained from everything clamorous

and contentious. He was willing to suffer rather than to strive.

3. *Gracious and benignant* in all His dealings with His people, however weak and unworthy (β.)

In all these particulars, our great Master is to be admired and imitated by all who work for Him. Let them study with the closest attention this Divine model. If they work the works of Christ, let them imbibe and exemplify the spirit of Christ (2 Tim. ii. 24, 25).

IV. THE SUCCESS WHICH SHALL CROWN THE MESSIAH'S UNDERTAKING.

1. The work of Christ shall ultimately succeed. (1.) "Judgment shall be set in the earth." (2.) This happy effect shall be produced, not only in a few nations, but universally, for even "the isles," the most distant Gentile nations, "shall wait for Christ's law" (cf. chap. ii. 2, 3).

2. Before this work shall be finally accomplished, it will encounter formidable obstacles, but they cannot hinder its triumph. He who is at its head "shall not fail nor be discouraged till He have set judgment in the earth."

3. The certainty of success rests on such grounds as these: (1.) The almighty power and inviolable faithfulness of God, who has called the Messiah to this work, and will therefore uphold Him in the discharge of His office (vers. 5, 6). (2.) God's regard to His own honour (vers. 8, 13, 14).

APPLICATION.—The subject teaches us—1. The great and beneficial results of our Saviour's advent, and of the dispensation of the Gospel. 2. The duty of perseverance in our endeavours to spread the light and grace of the Gospel. 3. The necessity of a personal submission to Christ.—*Jabez Bunting, D.D.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 21–50.

(α) The rational soul in our Lord's nature was a distinct thing from the principle of Divinity to which it was so united; and being so distinct, like the souls of other men it owed the right use of its faculties in its exercise of them on religious subjects, and its uncorrupted rectitude of will, to the influence of the Holy Spirit of God.—*Horsley.*

(β) Of such persons a *reed*, frail and insignificant in itself, and still more so when bruised by an external agency, and the *wick* of an almost extinguished lamp, which no longer flames, but only *smokes* in its socket, and cannot be rekindled but by a fresh application of external fire, are striking emblems. Such reeds the Messiah will not break, but strengthen and restore; such smoking wicks He will not quench, but rekindle and revive (*H. E. I.* 951; *P. D.* 474).

We find it easier, in human affairs, to discover a fault than to suggest a remedy; we complain without an effort to redeem or to amend. It is not so with Scripture, which is the Word of God. There each word of rebuke is a means to an end. There is no exposure of evil to exhibit the censor's superiority. There is no delight in the merciless anatomy of sin. There is no mockery of distress by the presentation of sorrow that is hopeless, or leprosy beyond cure. Equal to the need and surpassing it, present as soon as the need is felt and acknowledged—there is redemption. To illustrate this thought you have only to look at the verses immediately before the text (xli. 28, 29). As soon as you have realised this necessity, while the heart is yet paining under the sadness which the thought of it has created, the bright light is in the clouds, and in the midst the vision of the Redeemer: "Behold My Servant," &c. This passage refers to Christ and His great work in the world (Matt. xii. 18, &c.)

I. THE NEED OF THE WORLD.

This is affirmed in this passage to be the bringing forth or establishment of God's "judgment." The word has many senses in Scripture, but there are three to which we may especially refer (cf. *first*, Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20, and Isa. i. 17; *secondly*, Luke xi. 42 and Ps. cxix. 20; *thirdly*, in the quotation of the text in Matthew's Gospel it would seem to have reference to the dispensation of grace). These meanings discover the world's strongest necessity to-day—a bringing forth of "judgment"—

1. *As a revelation of God's Word and will.* Who that looks abroad upon the world but must mourn over the bewilderment and confusion of its inhabitants in re-

lation to the things of God? Where there is no revelation there is obscure and distorted vision, and the people perish. Who that looks into his own heart, and frets himself with the many problems of existence which the human mind hath no skill to solve, can forbear the longing for a higher wisdom, for a voice which can make itself heard, and which, when heard, can silence the battle of strange tongues, and in imperial tones proclaim to us the true? This yearning is answered when the judgments of God are revealed to men. In the life and teaching of our Lord we have this revelation.

2. As *essential rightness.* The original derangement, how thoroughly has it infused itself into every part of the universe, and into every faculty of man! There is no light, no hope. Through the long darkness the eyes strain upward for the glimpse of the day; "the isles wait for the law;" the universal conscience cries out for its coming, and for lack of it "the whole creation travaileth together until now."

3. As *a dispensation of power*, because ignorance and impurity are helpless and "without strength," until "in due time Christ dies for the ungodly." Without the revelation of this power all other would be an aggravation of the torture. The effect of the Saviour's mediatorial work is described as the "judgment of this world," and the casting out of its prince from his usurped dominion. As the special anointing for the great work of deliverance, God says of Christ, "I have put My Spirit upon Him." That Spirit is a spirit of power. Where He works there can be blindness and feebleness no longer. Here, then, are the wants of the world met by the bringing forth of judgment from the Lord. The world needs nothing "save Jesus only." All its wants are met in the person of its Surety. Let Him work to the completion of His purpose, and Aceldama must bloom into Paradise. All social wrongs will vanish. All religious evils will be ended. Scepticism will not shake the faith, nor blasphemy curdle the blood. Fanaticism will no longer be grafted upon the reasonable service of the Gospel; men will rejoice in the white light of truth, and blush that they have been accustomed to obscure or distemper its rays; Charity will be no longer a fugitive, housed by stealth in hearts warmer than their fellows, but her rejoicing shall be in the habitable parts of the earth, and her spirit the inspiration of the kingdom "which cannot be moved," for He shall reign whose right it is, and Christ shall be all in all.

II. THE DESIGNATION OF THE WORLD'S DELIVERER.

The terms here applied to Jesus abundantly show the harmony of counsel in the Godhead touching the great work of man's rescue from ruin.

1. Christ is called "the Servant" of the Father. In at least three other places in this prophecy is this term used (ch. lii. 13, liii. 11, xlix. 6). It is evident from these passages that our Lord is called the Servant of the Father in reference only to His Mediatorial work. He is not essentially a servant. He "took upon Him *the form* of a servant," and, with glad heart and willing feet, went forth to do a servant's work. There was confided to Him a task which no other could accomplish.

2. He is called again the "Elect" or Chosen of God, in whom His soul delighteth; or, as Matthew renders it, almost in the very words in which the Father attested the Son from heaven, "My Beloved, in whom I am well pleased." If proof were wanting of His essential equality with the Father, and that He was "Emmanuel, God with us," we might surely find it here Though in the form of a servant, He had the heart and love of a son. He was chosen to this work because none other was trustworthy. He only could "perfect for ever, by one offering, them that are sanctified." He was not only chosen to this work, but *beloved* on its account. Deep and everlasting as had been the love of the Father to the Son, it was intensified on account of

this (John x. 17). And He was the subject of special anointing from the Spirit. To this the text refers. Again, Isa. xi. 1, 2, and lxi. 1, 3, quoted by the Saviour in the synagogue of Nazareth. In unmeasured fulness the influences of the Spirit were upon Christ, to hallow and to counsel, to sustain and to make mighty, every act of His incarnate life. Even His sinless human nature needed the anointing of the Spirit to reunite it with all suitable qualifications. Thus we see the *whole Deity at work for man.* This should hush rebellion and scatter unbelief and indifference.

III. THE MANNER AND ISSUE OF THE REDEEMER'S WORK.

We are told that He works—

1. *Unostentatiously.* "He shall not cry," &c. This is in keeping with all the characteristics of the Saviour. And so quietly has Christianity spread its influences upon men. It does not "strive nor cry," but without strife or crying makes its way into the conscience of the world.

2. *Tenderly.* "A bruised reed," &c. The perfection of gentleness. If man were in question, how would the bruised reed and smoking flax be treated? The Saviour is great in gentleness; His mightiest energy is to redeem and save. And so tenderly does He watch over the progress of the Gospel in the world.

3. *Perseveringly and successfully.* "He shall not fail," &c. It is a plain and unmistakable prediction. This is a settled matter, which the risen Saviour "sits expecting" to realise, and which the faith of believers may anticipate on the warrant of His Word. He is not discouraged by sinister omens or unwonted opposition, by faithless traitors or by wearied friends. Against embattled earth and gathered forces of the pit He shall bring forth judgment unto victory, until He rests from His labour, until He gathers His children, until He wears His crown.—*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 18. &c.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAH.

1. *He was God's Servant.* Supposes—(1.) Subordination and inferiority. Should this appear mysterious, so it must remain. (2.) Service or work to be done. Jehovah had work to be done in this part of His dominions. Could be effected by Christ alone. (3.) Subjection (Matt. xxxi. 39).

2. *He was God's Elect.* To elect is to choose: Christ was chosen (Ps. lxxxix. 19; 1 Pet. ii. 4–6). This shows that the act of redemption originated in the Divine will; that it was free and not necessitated; that man's salvation is infinitely dear to God.

3. *He was God's Elect, in whom His soul delighted.* He was God's "dear Son," and His "beloved Son," who was in the bosom of the Father; and "yet He spared not," &c.

II. THE QUALIFICATION OF THE MESSIAH.

"I have put My Spirit upon Him." God put His Spirit upon Christ—1. As a public recognition of His Messiahship (Mark i. 9–11). 2. To fortify Him against the attacks of temptation (Luke iv. 1, 2). 3. To anoint Him for preaching the Gospel (Luke iv. 18). 4. For the purpose of working miracles (Matt. xii. 28; Acts x. 38).

III. THE WORK OF THE MESSIAH (ver. 1). The term "judgment" is differently interpreted. (See other Outlines.)

IV. THE TEMPER OF THE MESSIAH (vers. 2–4). "He did His work.—1. Unostentatiously. 2. Tenderly and compassionately. 3. Courageously and fearlessly. An example for all who are now working for Him.

CONCLUSION.—1. Seek to have the Messiah's work accomplished in *you.* 2. Seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in order that you may be able to accomplish any work to which He has called you.—*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 284 (new ed.)

The Elect and Beloved Servant.

(*Christmas or Missionary Sermon.*)

xlii. 1. *Behold My Servant, &c.*

This is a call to attention. It is the announcement of a Saviour. When the infant Jesus was brought to the Temple, Simeon recognised in Him the Lord's Anointed, whom he was to see before his death. He concluded his song with words borrowed from the sixth verse of this chapter: "A light to lighten the Gentiles." The whole passage is quoted Matt. xii. 18–21.

"Behold the man," said Pilate. "Behold My Servant," says God.

I. His Divine appointment.

The text is the Father's authentication of His Son's commission and appointment to His redeeming work.

1. *As a servant.* A servant is subordinate to his employer. There may be equality of nature while there is subordination in office. The son of a king is equal in nature to his father, while he takes a subordinate position as appointed by him to some office. The Son of God took upon Him "the form of a servant." He was "made of a woman, made under the law." He took the nature of man, that He might be in the position of servitude proper to man, render a full obedience to the law, and suffer on the cross the curse due to those who had failed to render the obedience to which they were bound.

2. *As a chosen servant.* "No man taketh this honour unto himself" (Heb. v. 4, 5). Among all beings in the universe, human or angelic, no other was found competent to the great redeeming work. He was therefore chosen and appointed from eternity. "Mine Elect."

3. *As a satisfactory servant.* "In whom My soul delighteth." At His baptism, and again at His transfiguration, the Voice from heaven was heard saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." By the resurrection from the dead He was "declared to be the Son of God with power." The Father was well pleased with Him from all eternity. He was well pleased with the manner in which He performed His work on earth.

4. *As a supported servant.* "Whom I uphold." Although for a season He veiled the splendours of His divine nature, His human nature was not left without divine support. During all His earthly career there was the most intimate fellowship between the Father and Himself. Some of His mightiest works were performed after special seasons of prayer. The consciousness of His Father's supporting presence kept Him from breaking down beneath the load of suffering, care, and human sin that continually pressed upon Him.

II. His special endowment.

"I have put my Spirit upon Him." Read lxi. 1–3, with Luke iv. 17–21. The relation between the persons of the Godhead cannot be fully apprehended by us; nor can we fully apprehend the action of the Father upon the Son, nor of the Spirit in connection with the Father and the Son. It becomes us to keep close to the letter of Scripture. Still Scripture speaks clearly of some distinction between the Persons of the Godhead, and of a mutual action or going forth of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost in connection with the redemption work. Thus the Son of God, who became a servant, received His qualification and anointing as man for His work. God gave not the Spirit by measure unto Him. He possessed it during His earthly ministry; and then, after His glorification, shed it forth on His Church.

This anointing of the Saviour, corresponding to the ancient anointing of the prophets, priests, and kings of the former dispensation, answers to the threefold office of Christ, which

relates to the threefold requirement of our nature.

1. We are ignorant and blinded by sin. Christ received the Spirit as the Teacher of the Church. All that heard Him were astonished.

2. We are guilty and condemned. An atonement was necessary, but was out of our power. He is the anointed Priest. In that capacity He has offered the sacrifice of Himself.

3. We are unholy and depraved. Yet we are under obligation to be holy. Christ is the anointed King. He sends His Spirit into our hearts, and we willingly submit to His authority. "Being by the right hand of God exalted, He hath shed forth this" —(1.) On the Apostles, so that they were endowed for their work of preaching and teaching (John xiv. 26). Hence we have the record of His words, the inspired Epistles, the doctrine of Christ. (2.) On such as are called to service and office in the Church. His ministers must be called and qualified by His Spirit. He gives sympathy with His work of saving men; willingness to consecrate life to it; love that seeks no personal interest, regards only the grand spiritual end and the immortal issues of labour for Christ. (3.) On all who are interested in His grace (Rom. viii. 9; 1 John ii. 19).

III. HIS EXPANSIVE WORK.

"He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." Observe—

1. *What He will bring forth.* "Judgment." Synonymous, as in Ps. cxix., with the divine law or revelation. Hence the method of the divine government, and eventually the manifestation of the Gospel.

2. *To whom.* "The Gentiles." The old prophets frequently dwell on the incorporation of the Gentiles with the Church. The opposite of the spirit of exclusiveness that characterised the Jews. The Gospel is expansive. It contemplates the day when the knowledge of Christ shall be diffused over the wide world.

3. *How.* By the universal proclamation of Christ as the world's Saviour.

Christ is the manifestation of God's wisdom and love. Let us remember His love. Let us yield to His claim of expansive love and devoted service. Let us be co-workers with God in the endeavour to attract attention to Him who is chosen and appointed, as He is exclusively qualified to be the centre of faith and hope to human souls. Cry, Behold Him!—*J. Rawlinson.*

I. "*Behold My Servant, whom I uphold.*" These words must be understood of Christ in His *mediatorial capacity.* If He be not viewed as Jesus upheld by the Father, there is something unintelligible in the prediction; if our Redeemer be not God, in every sense equal to the Father, co-eternal, co-essential, the whole of revelation is flimsy and worthless. But it is often necessary to speak exclusively of His *humanity;* and Christ Jesus, as *man,* is the subject of the prophetic announcement. As perfect man, He was the Father's servant (Phil. ii. 7; John iv. 34, vii. 16, &c.) Is it necessary to suppose that His nature was *fallen* nature in order that such a sacrifice might have its force? Not so; but believing as we do that His human nature was *not* fallen nature, we still believe that it was preserved from becoming so by the energies of the Holy Spirit, communicated without measure by the Father. It is to deny the nature of a creature to suppose it incapable of falling; we cannot ascribe to man properties that would make him cease to be man. God upheld Christ's humanity by the power of the indwelling Spirit, so that the potentiality of sinning never passed over into actuality. He was so completely upheld, that not the least element of sinfulness could ever be traced to a single action of His. Still, by being allowed—if the expression be not too bold—to become, sometimes almost overpowered, He learned to have a fellow-feeling—sympathy in the true sense of that word—with the believer in his conflict, though He never had partnership with him in his

transgression (Heb. v. 7; H. E. I. 849, 866, 873).

II. "*Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth.*" Christ Jesus was the Elect of God, in that from all eternity Infinite Wisdom had chosen Him to execute the sovereign purposes of infinite mercy (Heb. v. 4, 5). It lay beyond human conception to imagine the Father reconciling the sinner to Himself in the complex person of our Surety. Had the thought been suggested, we should have expected to see the human temple burned up and turned into ashes by such a sublime and mysterious union.

Why should God delight in this elect Mediator? Because — 1. *The mediation of Christ magnified every Divine attribute* (2 Cor. iii. 18; Heb. i. 3). Christ became the shining forth of God's glory to man (John xiv. 9). He stood in the midst of an evil generation, but He made it manifest that He was a Being of another world; He was armed with power, before which every created thing bowed down. Note especially, the degree in which Christ Jesus glorified God by His vicarious sufferings and obedience. Contrast holiness, truth, power, and wisdom, as manifested (for they should have been manifested) in man, left an outcast through the first Adam, and man made perfect through the mediation of the Son, and you will not fail to perceive that Christ crucified is the Father glorified—that Christ suspended on the cross for man is God exalted, and avenged, and vindicated.

2. *It met every human necessity.* Man had been brought under condemnation, and Christ endured that condemnation. Man, even when freed from condemnation, has no righteousness of his own that can be acceptable in the sight of God; but Christ obeyed in all points of the law; and now, where God does not impute sin, He does impute the righteousness of His Son. Man, though pardoned through Christ's death, though justified through Christ's life, is yet unfit to enter into the association of the pure; but Christ has risen to intercede for him and procure the gift of the Holy Spirit for his sanctification; and thus, beyond his title, he acquires a meetness for his inheritance (1 Cor. i. 30). "Behold," then, "Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth!"

CONCLUSION.—Try yourselves by the simple criterion which this subject presents. Is your dependence placed on the might by which the Mediator was upheld? Do you delight in Christ for any of the reasons which made the Father well-pleased in Him, or are you wrapped up in that formality which is the pestilential blight of so much religion?—*Henry Melvill, B.D.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 67–74.

Religion, if it be important, is all-important. However little importance we may attach to it, God attaches a great deal. Mark its personal aspect. "Behold!"—a message to every member of the human family. We are not addressed in the mass, but in our individual characters. As in the judgment-day each shall find himself singled out from the crowd, so every man in Scripture has a distinct and personal message sent to him, as having the deepest personal interest in the promises and threatenings of the Word of God. We love to escape this personality, to mingle in the crowd, to escape reflection. But God mercifully will not permit this, for we should lose much by it. To young and old, rich and poor, He says, "Behold My Servant," &c.

I. BEHOLD AND WONDER at the extent of love which pervades the scheme of our redemption. "Behold!"—it is a word of wonder, and indeed there is in Christ a world of wonders. Everything is wonderful in Him. The whole Christian religion is a concatenation of wonders, "a chaining together of mystery upon mystery." He is wonderful in His person, in His name, in His offices, in the design and character of His work—bringing into life by His death, to glory by His shame. He is the great centre of

attraction to heaven and earth; the Father loves Him, angels adore Him, all the redeemed repose their eternal confidence in Him.

"Behold" the display of love that reigns in our redemption—in the selection of such a Saviour, in the benefits that flow to us through Him. Consider the depth of degradation from which it raises, the height of glory to which it conducts. *Study* this love! In all times the world has been astonished at the extent of God's love to His people—in their deliverance from their greatest enemies, in the establishment of their brightest hopes. Jethro was astonished at their deliverance from Egypt (Exod. xviii. 9–11); the neighbouring natives at their rescue from Babylon (Ps. cxxvi. 2). But the love of Christ is more surprising still. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jews said, "Behold, how He loved him!" But His love for us passes the knowledge of the holiest saint on earth, of the wisest angel in heaven. Mourn the apathy of the world—let us mourn our own—to the claims of Christ.

II. BEHOLD AND TRUST. If God intrusts Him with the weight of His glory, you may with all the weight of your salvation. He is God's "Servant," God's "Elect," the object of God's delight. Why is this said but to show that whatever He did in the business of our salvation He did under the seal of Divine authority? He was God's Chosen—chosen to be the Head of the Church, the great Peacemaker between earth and heaven. It is a great prop and encouragement to our sinking faith, a great satisfaction to the troubled conscience, that in all that Christ did for us, and in all that He works in us, He is the object of Divine complacency and delight. In all our approaches and applications to God, let this minister boldness to us, that we go to Him in the name of One whom He loves (P. D. 2314).

III. BEHOLD AND LOVE. If God delights in Christ, we should too. The estimate in which Christ is held by us is the most decisive test of oneness of sentiment between God and us. "If God were your Father, ye would love me." Christ is God's Elect, God's Chosen; if He be not ours, there is a great contrariety between Him and us. Great is His love for us; let us return it. He sets a high value on the pardoned sinner's love. "Unto you that believe, He is precious" (H. E. I. 1003, 1004, 3367, 3369, 3909; P. D. 2338, 2341).

IV. BEHOLD AND LIVE (Col. iii. 3, 4).—*Samuel Thodey.*

THE UNITY OF THE GODHEAD MANIFESTED IN THE SALVATION OF MAN.

(*Trinity Sunday.*)

xlii. 1. *Behold My Servant, &c.*

"The Lord our God is one Lord." But He has been pleased to reveal Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is inexplicable by us, but it is certainly Scriptural. Three Persons, but one God! By our text we are reminded that *the unity of the Persons in the Holy Trinity has been manifested in the salvation of man.*

I. THE LOVE OF THE FATHER.

We must never forget that the mission of the Son had its origin in the Father's pitying love for us (α).

1. The Son was sent forth by the Father. He came to accomplish the Father's purposes (1 John iv. 9, 10; John iii. 16).

2. It was because our Lord undertook to fulfil the purpose of the Father's heart that the Father loved Him: "Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth." The Father loved the Son eternally as God in the heaven of His own glory; but it is of the Father's love to the Son while living in a servant's form that He speaks here. Our text teaches us not only

that the Father appointed the Son to the work, and was willing that He should succeed, but was *well pleased* when He saw Him going forth on His high enterprise of mercy. Thus the whole scheme of redemption redounds to the glory of the Father.

3. How near that scheme lay to the Father's heart was manifested also in the manner in which He upheld His Son while He was engaged in its accomplishment: "My Servant, whom I *uphold*." It was by means of the grace of the Father that He was enabled to make the sacrifice needed for our salvation (Heb. ii. 9). He not only appointed His Son to the task, but ensured its fulfilment by supplying the strength required, and sustaining Him through the protracted conflict with the powers of darkness (β).

All this serves to confirm the inspired announcement, "God is love." Oh, that we could more fully realise the Father's love to our souls, and yield some larger measure of gratitude to Him who thus so wonderfully, even from everlasting, "first loved us" (H. E. I. 390, 2319–2321).

II. THE CONDESCENSION OF THE SON.

Though Lord of all, He became a "servant;" though worshipped by the seraphic hosts, He voluntarily became the despised and rejected of men. Though of spotless holiness, He took upon Him the world's sin, became a "curse" for His people, and humbled Himself to the worst malefactor's most ignominious death, "even the death of the cross."

III. THE CO-OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

"I have put My Spirit upon Him." 1. It was by the Holy Spirit that the Son was qualified for the accomplishment of the work He had undertaken (John i. 16, iii. 34). 2. It is by the Holy Spirit that the work of Christ is now carried on in the hearts of men (John xvi. 7, 8).—*Charles Kemble, M.A.: Seventeen Sermons*, pp. 325–349.

(α.) If we have any saving acquaintance with the Gospel, we are at all times disposed to offer to the Son of God the homage of gratitude and praise for the work of redemption. But there are times when we are in danger of falling into the mistake of regarding the Saviour as offering Himself as a sacrifice to propitiate an angry God. We are prone to contemplate the Father as a stern, uncompromising, and unpitying Judge, actuated by vindictive feelings, taking pleasure in exacting punishment and inflicting pain; or a personification (so to speak) of the attributes of almighty power, unerring wisdom, and unswerving justice. But there our view of the great Creator stops, and there our apprehension of Him who is the Moral Governor of the world becomes defective. . . . Contemplating the bleeding Victim, voluntarily bleeding to atone for the guilty, and to bring back rebels to reconciliation and peace, the justice, power, and love of the Father are well-nigh forgotten in the sight of the tenderness and self-abandonment displayed by the Son. . . . But this Scripture combines with others to teach us that if we would love Him "who first loved us," we must pass on from Calvary to Him whose will is accomplished by the death and passion of His Son.—*Kemble.*

(β.) Concerning this great mystery, see Dr. Bunting's comments in the Outline THE FATHER'S ELECT SERVANT, and the note by Bishop Horsley appended thereto.

CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE AS THE SERVANT OF GOD.

xlii. 1. *Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, &c.*

We need have no doubt about this text applying to Christ, for it is so stated by the Holy Spirit (Matt. xii. 17–21). Our Lord in His human nature, "in the form of a servant," needed to be "upheld," even as we do, by the Divine power. It was this that carried Him through the work given Him to do (Ps. xvi. 8; Isa. l. 7). "Though He were a Son," yet learned He obedience "*as a servant.*" It is so with all God's servants here on earth; they *are* sons of God, but they are called to prove their sonship by their service.

"Mine Elect." He was chosen of God for this service, called of God, sent of God to do God's work. It is so

with all God's servants. They do not choose God's service, but are chosen and sent of God. Just as in common life a master selects his own servants.

"In whom My soul delighteth." This was from all eternity, and throughout the whole period of His earthly service (Prov. viii. 30; Matt. iii. 17, xvii. 5).

"I have put My Spirit upon Him." This was to qualify Him, as man, for His undertaking, as He declared in the synagogue at Nazareth (Isa. lxi. 1, xi. 2). So is it again with all God's servants: His Spirit rests upon them, and only by His help can they serve.

"He shall bring forth judgment unto the Gentiles,"—declare God's will to them, and set up His statutes and ordinances throughout the world.

In these things we see the reality of His manhood, and what was needed to qualify Him for His work as the servant of God.

In speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ as the servant of God, we must understand it of the *office* He undertook, and actually did accomplish, through the union of His manhood with the Godhead. Remembering this, let us consider *the characteristics of a good servant*, and see how they were exemplified in our Lord.

A servant is one who is under a master; who does as he is told; who is willing to *do* and *not* to do; who receives his master's will as his rule, and does not evade, nor qualify, nor object, but does it all; who has his master's honour and interest at heart, always working and labouring for him. Such was Christ. The object of His whole life was to show Himself the servant of God. This should be *our* object. Observe—

1. *How absorbing this service was to Him.* It swallowed up all besides. Nothing was ever allowed to interfere with it (John iv. 6, 34, vi. 38, ix. 4; Matt. xxvi. 39; John xvii. 4).

2. *How love animated Him in all His service* (Ps. xl. 6–10). Especially notice, "Mine ears hast Thou opened;" or margin, "digged." The meaning of this we learn in Exod. xxi. 2–6. Christ served voluntarily and cheerfully, because He loved Him whose will He came into the world to accomplish (John x. 18).

3. *How thorough was His service.* He had but one object—to do the will of God. For this He lived, for this He died.

Are you following Christ as your example? Is your service of God *absorbing, loving, thorough?* What do you live for? To do God's will? If not, there is no conformity to Christ.

To follow Christ's example, a man must be born again of God's Spirit. It is the renewed will which desires and strives to do God's will. The desire may be but as a grain of mustard seed, but if cherished by prayer and practice, it will grow; though at first faint and feeble, it will become supreme (Matt. xxv. 29).

Every creature must be a servant, either of God or of self—of self in its lowest sense, the self of the "old man." But in serving God we serve self in its noblest sense.

Do you really long to serve Christ as He served His Father? But you are thinking to yourself, "What a character mine is! Mine is no fit character to take service with such a Master; I am such a sinner." Well, then, listen—

1. *Christ takes His servants without a character.* We know how important character is among men; how many fail of service for want of it; how hard it is to gain when once it is lost. If we never entered Christ's service until we had become fit for it, we never should enter. But He takes us just as we are. He asks only, "Are you willing to be My servant?" Where He finds this will, He gives character. Christian character is formed in Christ's service. Nowhere else can it be formed. Many try to form a character before they come to Him, but in vain. Come first.

2. *He gives the best wages:* pardon, peace, acceptance with God here, everlasting life hereafter. Look at the world's wages and see the difference (Rom. vi. 23). There are good wages

in the service as well as *for* it (Ps. xix. 11; Isa. xlviii. 18; Prov. iii. 17).

3. *His work is light.* It is called a cross, a yoke, a burden, that no man may take it up without counting the cost; but, when once taken up, it is light (Matt. xi. 29, 30; 1 John v. 3). Besides, who ever felt work hard for one he loved? (Gen. xxix. 20; H. E. I. 3336–3341).

4. *There is no dismissal.* No; they who enter Christ's service are taken for life—not for this life only (John x. 28). When their period of service is done here, He says, "Friend, come up higher," and the believer goes to Christ for ever (Rev. vii. 15).

Will you be Christ's servant? Give yourself to Him heartily, wholly. Think of the difference between the servant of sin and the Lord's freeman, *now* and *hereafter*. Come to Christ, and He will say of you what God says of Him, "Behold My servant, whom I uphold."—*J. W. Reeve. M.A.: Doctrine and Practice*, pp. 182–205.

Bruised, not Broken.

xlii. 1–4. *Behold My Servant, &c.*

There is no difficulty in determining the *subject* of this passage,; one interpretation alone is equal to its demands. In inviting attention to its *terms*, let us consider it as affording—

I. A Divine estimate of man. *A crushed reed, a dimly burning wick.* These are symbols of impaired, broken, perishing life; they convey the ideas of feebleness, helplessness, almost of worthlessness. There is in the crushed reed no power of self-recovery; the dimly burning wick is the merest mockery of a light. *So* is man as seen by the eye of God. *We* can estimate the reed and the lamp; what we see *them* to be, *God* sees *man* to be.

The estimate is not limited to the penitent and broken-hearted; the words signify apostate humanity. The scope of the passage implies the larger application. He is to bring forth judgment to the Gentiles; He has to set judgment on the earth, and the isles are to wait for His law; He is to encounter opposition—the *reed* and the *wick* will refuse His ministrations. But "He shall not cry," &c. Note the undertone of suffering. Men sneer, laugh, jeer, shout, rave, and gnash their teeth; His heart of pity yearns, and He says, "Bruised reeds and smoking wicks!" None more maimed and nearer to death than the impenitent.

II. The Divine method of treating man.

"A bruised reed shall He not break," &c. He does not use mere naked power, but patience.

1. *Think of how He might have treated man.* The text does not say, *cannot* break, *cannot* extinguish. Nothing hindered but grace. Christ was that truth unto which judgment should be brought; He *was*, and He declared, God's everlasting righteousness and love.

2. *Think of Him, the Truth, taking hold of weak, helpless humanity to give it life, health, and soundness.* He will not use force for man's destruction; neither *by* force will He restore, but by truth. *As force is discarded, suffering is incurred.* He who will save by truth must suffer; there is no help. Christ must be made a curse *for* man that He may bring redemption *to* him. The idea of suffering pervades the text; the "Elect" One must be upheld; for the salvation of the bruised must He be sustained; there is upon Him a grinding pressure, and under Him He will need, and must have, the Eternal Hand. The Immortal King must be succoured while He stands bearing the tremendous burden of a world's sin and sorrow. By no omnipotence will He put that burden away, yet He will put it away. He triumphs by the Cross. He is God, bent on

saving man by love and truth. The Incarnation and Atonement *are* both here (John xviii. 33–37). He must *suffer*, and He must *wait*. "But He will not fail nor be discouraged." He knows that patience will triumph. Truth has ever to wait for victory. The light cannot chase the darkness till its hour comes.

3. *The text is*, among other things, *a brief but wonderful exposition of the providence and government of God upon earth.* It reveals the principles of that government and is an interpreter of human history (Lam. iii. 22).

III. THE DIVINE CERTAINTY OF RECOVERING MAN.

The Servant, the Son, has not been sent forth on a chance or fruitless errand; the King is a triumphant Sufferer (ver. 4, ch. liii. 11, &c.; H. E. I. 979, 1168).—*W. Hubbard: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xiv. pp. 291–293.

It is agreed on all hands that the text alludes to weak and afflicted believers, setting forth the care and gentleness of the Lord. It is not quite so clear as to the source of the metaphor. Adopt the theory that the reed referred to is the shepherd's reed, his instrument of music. The reed is bruised. It was a mean instrument before, but now it is almost useless. The shepherd does not break it up and throw it away; it may recover its injuries, or, if it should not, it will emit some sort of sounds. The shepherd does not break his reed, for—

I. *He remembers its former services.* Often has its strains cheered him and others; old and precious memories are connected with it. Our Lord does not forget the services the weak and afflicted have rendered.

II. *He remembers there is a paucity of such reeds.* The shepherd would rather have the imperfect instrument than no reed at all. There is a scarcity of music in the moral world. The sweet notes of gratitude, and love, and hope are sung by few. The Lord loves the song of the upright, and when they lose the power of rejoicing He bears with them.

III. *He knows the possibility of the reed being rectified.* It is only bruised. The shepherd will use every means to restore it. The Lord knows the *certainty* of the recovery of His bruised ones. He teaches them to say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? for I *shall yet praise Him.*" He will not cast off those who say they are useless. Not cast off the aged. His design is by means of the bruising to make His children more joyful and useful in His house.

IV. *He prizes it because He fashioned it.* 1. The Lord chose the *reed.* He delights in the possession. 2. It cost Him very much. 3. He bruised the reed—by design.

CONCLUSION.—Recognise the fitness of the metaphor. Believe the declaration. "He will not break." Believe much more. The bruised reed shall be restored. He will carefully keep, and constantly seek to make it more useful than it was before.—*R. A. Griffin: Stems and Twigs*, p. 241.

THE BRUISED REED.

xlii. 3. *A bruised reed shall He not break.*

Of all the plants mentioned in Scripture, perhaps the reed was the most obscure and inconspicuous, the weakest and most worthless (α). It was peculiarly obnoxious to mischances; it grew where the wild beasts had their lairs, and it was so slim and fragile. Yet, abject and homely as it looked, a skilful hand could turn it to good account (β).

Here we read of One whose heart is as kind as His hand is skilful. Though so mighty that nothing can obstruct the progress of His purposes (ver. 4), He is as remarkable for His benignity as He is for His prowess. It is by

kindness that He conquers. It is by cherishing the smoking flax till it burst into flame that, with knowledge of Himself, He lightens every land, and by cementing and healing the bruised reed that He fashions those sharp arrows, those polished shafts by which He subdues the nations under Him.

The lesson which this passage teaches is, that *the Saviour is infinite in kindness.* Let three classes of persons lay it to heart.

I. Some of you have had dull feelings from thinking you were too inconsiderable for the Saviour's notice; you are not a rose of Sharon nor a cedar of Lebanon, but only one reed in a marshy thicket. But it is a chief glory of the Saviour that no littleness can evade His eye, no multitude of objects divide His heart. He is like His Heavenly Father (Matt. x. 29–31). In that forest of reeds He can take account of every blade that grows as easily as He can reckon the angels in each legion or the stars of heaven. Moreover, remember that your own is the very nature which Immanuel wore and still wears. He is not ashamed to be called your Brother; He who best understands what immortality means is pervaded by a profound and tender solicitude for all the deathless interests of *your* soul (H. E. I. 4631). If no man cares for your soul, the Saviour cares (ch. xlix. 15; H. E. I. 947).

II. This omniscient Saviour is gracious and gentle, and does not break the bruised reed. However high we may hold our heads, we are all bruised reeds. 1. *Sin has bruised us.* Just as far as we have broken God's commandments, our integrity, our uprightness, our rightness with God is broken. It is well when the sinner becomes aware of his ruined condition, and recognises himself as a bruised reed; for this is just the mood in which He longs to find us (Ps. li. 17, cxlvii. 3). 2. *Afflictions bruise us.* Nay, Christ sends them that they may bruise us. There are evils in us that cannot be got rid of in any other way. It would seem as if even Omnipotence could not sanctify a fallen and sinful spirit without the employment of sorrow. But when we are like a reed snapped asunder and all but broken through, let us remember how tender and sympathetic the Saviour is in applying these painful processes. He does not break the bruised reed; He apportions the trial to the exigency; He supports the fatigued or fainting soul (H. E. I. 179).

III. The reed is bruised, but the Saviour will not fail nor be discouraged until He have made it an implement of use, of beauty, or of majesty (H. E. I. 951). Its very weakness will elicit His divine power and matchless skill. 1. The sinner is obscure, but the Saviour is omniscient. 2. The sinner is a thing of grief and guilt, but the Saviour is gentleness and grace impersonate. 3. The sinner is in Himself worthless, but the Saviour is mighty, and out of the most worthless can make a vessel of mercy meet for the Master's use (γ).—*James Hamilton, D.D.: Works*, vol. vi. pp. 163–177.

(α.) The vine, the palm, the pomegranate yielded delicious fruit; the pine, the oak, the cedar were invaluable for their solid timber; and though the rose and the lily yielded no fruit, and could not be cut into timber, they owed a special endearment to their lovely tints and exquisite perfume. But this poor waif of the wilderness was bereft of every attraction. No one saw any beauty in its russet plume; no one could have tried to rub a morning meal from its chaffy husks, or to rear his cottage from its frail and hollow stems. And instead of growing in picturesque localities—instead of mooring its roots in the sides of Lebanon, or tossing healthfully in the breezes which sported and frolicked over the hills of Galilee—like a recluse or a reprobate, it sought the miry places, and grew in those oozy solitudes where fevers lurk and the foul air rises. So that for uselessness and ungainliness it became a perfect proverb; and of all errands it was the idlest to go out into the wilderness to see "a reed shaking in the wind."—*Hamilton.*

(β.) The stronger sorts were converted into that measuring-rod or mete-yard of which we read so frequently, or they furnished the light but serviceable staff on which the traveller leaned, or with which Bartimæus, old and blind, would grope his way. And the more slender sorts supplied with their appropriate weapons the warrior and the scribe. Shaped into

arrows, they filled the archer's quiver or rang from the strings of Jonathan; and shaped into the writer's pen, a little sheaf was always suspended in the scholar's girdle; and if that scholar were a man of God, a Moses, a Daniel, or a John, the reed which erst shook in the wilderness would be consigning to immortal leaves the mind of Inspiration.—*Hamilton.*

(γ.) In the days of His flesh the Saviour went out among the hills of Galilee and into the wilderness of Judah, and there He found reeds shaking in the wind. He found a few peasants, plain, ignorant, incompetent, carnal and coarse-minded, a crop as unattractive and unpromising as ever tried the patience of Infinite Love or the resources of Infinite Power. But still the Saviour set His heart upon them. He chose them out, and commenced His transforming process on them; and, notwithstanding their refractoriness, He did not fail nor get discouraged, till——Whence came those pens, so nimble and so apt, with which the Holy Spirit wrote the things which Jesus began to do and to teach until the day that He was taken up? That one so steady, broad, and clear in its Hebrew strokes? That other, so like "a feather from an angel's wing," so limpid, pure, and loving? And those arrows in the Gospel's first crusade, so sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies—those bolts of fire which subdued the people in Pentecostal hours—what are they, and whence came they? Ah! these were reeds of the wilderness once—reeds growing on the edge of Gennesareth, shaking, battered reeds; but passing by, Jesus set His love upon them. Dingy, He did not despise them; bruised, He did not break them; but by dint of His divine painstaking He sharpened some into the pen of a ready writer, and, barbed with truth and winged with zeal, He polished others into shafts of celestial power. He did not fail nor get discouraged till, with pen and arrow forged from a bruised reed, He conquered the world, judgment was set in the earth, and the isles waited for His law.—*Hamilton.*

The Gentleness of Christ.

xlii. 3. *A bruised reed shall He not break, &c.*

In this prophecy Isaiah foretells the gentleness of Christ (H. E. I. 951–961; P. D. 47, 1630). St. Matthew quotes it when he is recording the long-suffering of our Lord with the Pharisees. His ministry was not a public disputation, with clamour and popular applause, with factions in the city, and a following of people; it was silent and penetrating, "as the light that goeth forth;" spreading everywhere with resistless power, and yet from a source often withdrawn from sight. So soft and light, the text seems to say, shall be His touch, that the reed which is nearly asunder shall not be broken down, and the flax which has only not left off to smoke shall not be put out. It was in His gentleness, His tender compassion, His long-suffering and patient endurance of sinners, that this and other like prophecies were fulfilled.

I. Examples of Christ's gentleness recorded in Scripture.

1. *In all His dealing with His disciples.* The first faint stirrings of faith and love He cherished and sheltered with tender care; in His teaching He led them on little by little (Luke ix. 55; John xiv. 9; Mark ix. 33, 34; John xx. 27; xxi. 15–17). 2. *And so in like manner to all the people* (Matt. xi. 28–30). He permitted so near an access to all men that it was turned to His reproach; He was "a friend of publicans and sinners;" "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke vii. 36–48; John viii. 3–11).

II. Some great truths taught us by Christ's gentleness.

1. *It implies that where there is so much as a spark of life in the conscience, there is possibility of entire conversion to God.* Where there is room to hope anything, there is room to hope all things. Such is the nature of sin and of the human soul; such, also, the virtue of the blood of Christ and such the power of the Holy Ghost, that the greatest of sinners may become we dare not say how great a saint (ch. i. 18; H. E. I. 1071). Illustrations often become our snares; *e.g.*, we speak of the stains of sin, the soils of lust; but the spiritual nature, though really sustaining these, is capable, as the body is not, of a perfect healing. The very life of sin is the will. By conversion, from being corrupt and unclean, it becomes cleansed and pure. It is imperfect, as subjected to the flesh; but when disem-

bodied, what shall hinder its being as pure as if it had never sinned? And if so, how can we limit its purification in this world? In a moment the human spirit may virtually and truly anticipate an habitual condition of the soul; in a true death-bed repentance there is contained a life of purity though it be never here developed into act.

2. *The only sure way of fostering the beginnings of repentance is to receive them with gentleness and compassion.* This is a truth which is in the mouth of more than rightly understand it. Some Christ received with a Divine love and pity, and some with a piercing severity; but these last were those only of whom, it seems, there was hope no longer; the reed was already broken and the flax quenched (Matt. xxiii. 13-15, xxi. 31, 32; Luke vii. 30). But sometimes the pure severity of compassion is confounded with personal harshness of temper. Truth told without love is perilous in the measure in which it is true; but encouragement of sinners before they are penitents is even more dangerous. With ineffable compassion Christ spake words of fear and warning (Luke xiii. 3; Matt. xviii. 3; Luke xiii. 24; Matt. xx. 16, x. 22; Luke ix. 62, &c.) One great hindrance to true conversion is an imperfect knowledge of His Divine character; sinners fear to come within the range of those eyes that are "as a flame of fire." It was in this peculiar wretchedness of sin that the gentleness of Christ gave to sinners both solace and hope; it was a strange courage—boldness without trembling, awe without alarm—which came upon them in His presence; it was an affinity of the Spirit working in penitents with His Spirit that made them draw to Him; their fears were quelled, and this opened a new future to them. Knowing the nature of man, its strange depths and windings, He knew that this was the surest way of winning them to Himself. And have we not made trial of this same gracious and tender compassion? How long some of us have neglected or rejected Him! How is His forbearance and compassion tried in the slow formation of our religious character! *Our* trials are all so wisely measured to our strength that the bruised reed is never broken.

CONCLUSION. — How great a consolation there is in this Divine tenderness of Christ! Be your beginning never so late, yet if it be true, all shall one day be well. It is a word of cheer to us all. Alas! for us if He were soon wearied out as we are, soon provoked ready to upbraid, sharp in the strokes of His hand; where should we have been long ago?—*Henry Edward Manning: Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 377–400.

Strictly interpreted, this is a description of the manner in which the Saviour will effect the triumphs of His kingdom. Unlike other conquerors, He will not proceed by destroying the weak. As His progress is to be unostentatious (ver. 2), so it is to be merciful. But this is to be because He is merciful; and so this verse may be regarded as an intimation of His personal character, and may be used to comfort sincere but desponding Christians. Consider—

I. THE EMBLEMS OF OUR TEXT.

A bruised reed. A reed is a slender, tender, and exceedingly fragile plant, and is therefore a very suitable emblem of weakness. If you lean upon it it will break; the slightest collision may bruise it. A reed in its best estate is of little value; a bruised reed is altogether worthless.

Smoking flax, or, as it might be rendered, "a smoking wick," referring to the wick of a lamp, whose flame is not bright, because it has only just been kindled, or of which the flame has died away, and in which nothing but a spark of fire remains.

These emblems set forth—1. *What we all are.* We are all reeds, feeble, fragile, bruised; in us all the flame of piety burns faint and dim. Alas! in how many it is dying utterly! 2. *What many feel themselves to be.* This consciousness of weakness and worthlessness is very humbling and painful.

Yet it is a step towards safety and true blessedness (Matt. v. 3 ; Isa. lxvi. 2).

II. THE DECLARATIONS OF OUR TEXT.

"A bruised reed *shall He not break*, and the smoking flax *shall He not quench.*" More is intended than is here expressed. The reed must break if He will not strengthen it; the smoking flax must be quenched if He keep not the flame alive. In each of these declarations there is an expression of the tenderness of Jesus to the feeblest of His followers.

A bruised reed shall He not break, that is—1. He will not leave those who are impressed with a sense of their guilt to sink into despair. 2. He will not leave those who have been overthrown by some fierce blast of temptation and almost broken off from Him to perish.

The smoking flax shall He not quench, that is—He will not despise the day of small things in relation to our piety. He will fan the feeble spark of our devotion into a flame.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS.

1. *Let none but sincere believers dare to draw comfort from this text.* There is a broad line of demarcation to be drawn between the man who willingly remains weak and immature in Christian excellences, and the weak Christian who is sincerely endeavouring to grow in grace, but makes slow progress therein, and thereby is tempted to despair.

2. *There may be perfect sincerity where there is great weakness.* It is about our sincerity that we should be most concerned, and there are certain infallible tests by which it may be ascertained. The feeblest saint is the sworn and steadfast enemy of sin ; he longs to be like God ; he diligently uses the means of grace ; he clings to the Saviour, acknowledges Him before the world, and endeavours to live to His glory.

3. *Where there is great weakness, Christ will manifest great tenderness* (ch. xl. 11). Let us not dishonour Him by distrust of His mercy.

4. *Let us learn to imitate the tenderness of our Redeemer* (Rom. xiv. 1, xv. 1–7). A censorious Christian is utterly unlike Christ. Unnecessary wounds innumerable have been inflicted, unspeakable mischief done, by the severe and rash judgments of narrow-minded Christians. Let us remember what *we* once were, to whom we are indebted for our attainments, and our Lord's warning respecting humble Christians (Matt. xviii. 10).—*William Reeve.*

The virtues of mortals, when carried to a high degree, very often run into those vices which have a kind of affinity to them. "Right too rigid hardens into wrong." Strict justice steels itself into excessive severity, and the man is lost in the judge. Goodness and mercy sometimes degenerate into softness and irrational compassion inconsistent with government. But in Jesus Christ these seemingly opposite virtues centre and harmonise in the highest perfection. Hence He is at once characterised as a Lamb and as the Lion of the tribe of Judah: a lamb for gentleness towards humble penitents, and a lion to tear His enemies in pieces. He is said to "judge and make war," and yet He is called "The Prince of Peace."

The general meaning of the text seems to be, that the Lord Jesus has the tenderest and most compassionate regard to the feeblest penitent, however oppressed and desponding, and that He will approve and cherish the least spark of true love toward Himself. Regard—

I. The character of a weak believer as represented by "a bruised reed." The idea conveyed is that of a state of weakness and oppression. Under some burden or other many an honest-hearted believer groans out the most part of His life. He finds himself weak in knowledge, in love, in faith, in hope, in joy, in everything in which he should be strong. These weaknesses or defects the believer feels painfully and tenderly, and bitterly laments them ; and in this is the grand distinction between him and the

rest of the world. He is sensible that his weakness has guilt in it, and therefore he laments it with ingenuous sorrow. He is a *bruised reed* (H. E. I. 1276–1285, 1995–2003, 2513–2516, 2633, 3366, 4475).

II. The character of a weak believer as represented by "smoking flax." The idea conveyed is that of grace true and sincere, but languishing and just expiring, like a candle just blown out, which still smokes and retains a feeble spark of fire. It signifies a susceptibility of a further grace, or a readiness to catch that sacred fire, as a candle just put out is easily rekindled. It means religion in a low degree. The weak Christian has very few, and but superficial, exercises of mind about divine things; but he feels an uneasiness, an emptiness, an anxiety within, under which he pines, and all the world cannot heal the disease. His soul "pants for God;" the evaporations of the smoking flax naturally ascend toward heaven. He cannot be reconciled to his sins,—not through fear of punishment, but from a sense of the intrinsic baseness of sin.

He is jealous of the sincerity of his religion, and afraid that all his past experiences were delusive. Hell would be a sevenfold hell to a lover of God. Sometimes he seems driven by the tempest of temptation from off the rock of Jesus Christ; but he makes towards it on the stormy billows.

In short, the weakest Christian sensibly feels that his comfort rises and falls as he lives nearer to or farther from his God.

III. The care and compassion of Jesus Christ for such poor weaklings. Who is there that does not believe it? But it is no easy thing to establish a trembling soul in the full belief of this truth. The understanding may be convinced, but the heart may need to be more deeply affected with this truth.

Dwell, then, upon the emphatic testimony of Holy Scripture that Christ has a peculiar tenderness for the poor, the mourners, the broken-hearted (lxi. 1–3; lxvi. 1, 2; lvii. 15). He charges Peter to feed His "lambs" as well as His sheep, *i.e.*, to take the tenderest care of the weakest in His flock; and He severely rebukes the shepherds of Israel (Ezek. xxxiv. 1–4). See the contrast in the character of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls! (ch. xl. 10, 11; Ps. cii. 16–20). His people in every age have ever found these promises made good. David (Ps. xxxiv. 4). But why multiply instances? Go to His cross! There you may read the same evidence of His compassion as Thomas had of His resurrection.

CONCLUSION. — Why should the bruised reed shrink from Him when He comes not to tread it down, but raise it up? Do not indulge causeless doubts and fears concerning your sincerity. Examine them, and search whether there be any sufficient reason for them; and if you discover there is not, then reject them and set them at defiance (Ps. xliii. 5).—*President Davies: Great Sermons of Great Preachers*, pp. 433–445.

I. In seasons of sorrow and dejection the words of our text are all-powerful to supply consolation.

II. They are not less instructive as a directory of our conduct towards the young and inexperienced. That great tenderness and forbearance combined with wisdom and discretion are necessary in the moral and intellectual training of youth, the recollection of our own early years may well enforce. Great diversity of means and method will be found necessary to adapt our measures to the various capacities, dispositions, and tempers of the young (H. E. I. 817–821).

III. These words are to be remembered in the exercise of discipline within the Church. While wilful inconsistency is not to be tolerated in its members (1 Cor. v. 11–13), those who are unwillingly betrayed into sin, and are sorrowfully struggling against it, are to be treated compassionately and helpfully (Gal. vi. 1, 2).—*Samuel Warren, LL.D.: Sermons on Practical Subjects*, pp. 358–360.

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE MESSIAH.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

xlii. 4. *He shall not fail nor be discouraged, &c.*

The coming of Christ was the great object of expectation to the Church for 4000 years. The leading design of all prophecy was to keep alive that expectation. The text introduces Christ to us (Matt. xii. 18-21).

I. THE GRAND AND COMPREHENSIVE OBJECT WHICH CHRIST CONTEMPLATES. "Till He have set salvation in the earth." This was—1. *A very needful object.* Man, guilty and depraved, needed both a Saviour and a Sanctifier. 2. *A very benevolent object,* and accords with the large and extensive grace of the Son of God. 3. *A very difficult object*—one to which none but Christ was equal. The claims of the law must be met, the honours of the Divine administration upheld and repaired, the enmity of the human heart subdued, all the powers of evil overcome. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested; from these difficulties He did not shrink. He descended to Bethlehem, to the wilderness of the Temptation; exposed Himself to the contradiction of sinners through life; agonised in Gethsemane, bled on Calvary, ascended from Olivet. In its prosecution He never faltered while He was on earth; and in heaven He devotes to it His Divine power. It is indeed a work that requires the constant agency and superintendence of Him who commenced it.

II. THE SPIRIT AND CONSTANCY WITH WHICH HE CARRIES IT ON. The prophecy is true still that He shall not fail nor be discouraged till all the results of His mediation are complete in the final spread of the Gospel. To a human eye there are in the moral state and condition of society, after Christianity has been in the world so many hundred years, many grounds for discouragement, such as—(1.) The benighted condition of the heathen world. Calculate the numbers upon whom the light of truth has never shone. (2.) The present state of Christendom at large—those nations which possess the Gospel, and have partially acknowledged its claims, but through the blinding influences of corrupt forms of Christianity are almost hopelessly involved in mental delusion and error. (3.) The controversies that prevail at home, and the slow progress of vital Christianity in the most-favoured circles, in our congregations, in religious families. In all these fields we perceive what we might easily suppose are omens of failure.

But by none of them are we to be discouraged. By them all Christ is not moved. Let me assign some reasons why He is not apprehensive as to the results of His sacrifices and endeavours, and why we should not hesitate in our efforts to extend the Gospel.

1. *The long reign of evil and the long contest between truth and error have been distinctly foretold, and are parts therefore of His own system of moral government, and are all comprehended in His calculations.* Foretold from the beginning. First promise asserts it. All the prophecies suppose it. Our Lord's parables declare it. The Book of Revelation announces it: the woman is to be a long time in the wilderness, &c. Religion in our world is a strange plant in an ungenial soil. The boar out of the wood will try to waste it; the wild beast to devour the vine. The poison is slowly extirpated. The Son of Man goes on conquering and to conquer. It is a part of the Divine designs that evil should display itself; that truth and error should meet in open conflict; that no unsettled controversy should remain.

2. *The victory obtained upon the Cross, when the empire of darkness was essentially broken, contains the germ and the pledge of final and complete triumph* (John xii. 31, 32). The power that conquered then can conquer always

We know not the nature and extent of the conquest, how much was involved in it, and what great results were comprehended in it; but other and superior natures do. Angels rejoice in it (Ps. lxviii. 17, 18). Devils tremble at it. They always knew that in Christ was their conqueror (Mark i. 24, &c.) No attempt was made by the infernal powers during the forty days after the resurrection; a sufficient proof that they felt their overthrow.

3. *There is in the works of God a character of progressive developmnt, of which we find strong traces in religion itself.* The progress in the dispensations: Antediluvian, Patriarchal, Mosaic, Prophetic, Christian. Our questionings respecting the slow progress of Christianity seem to imply that while human works admit preparation, the works of God must be done instantly. But this expectation is contradicted by the whole course of Nature. For though God may at once do all His pleasure, yet for wise reasons He employs means, and allows such a gradual operation of those means as admits of a progress in which one thing prepares the way for another, giving notice of its approach. God in the revelation of religion seems always to have proportioned His discoveries not only to the actual wants of mankind, but to their capacity of receiving truth and their means of communicating it to others. The same means must be used for diffusing Christianity as for spreading any other system of truth; but in addition to these it has the twofold support of Divine providence and Divine influence. Having these, though the progress is slow, we must not fail in our efforts, nor be discouraged. In that which sometimes saddens us there is nothing surprising.

4. *God has given to the Church an instrument of proved efficiency and power*—truth, Divine truth! Falsehood has no unity, no stability. In Scriptural truth there is a real adaptation to man (H. E. I. 1151, 2421–2427). When fairly propounded before him, it is felt to be "a faithful saying." "The power of God unto salvation." The weapons of this holy war, what victories have been already achieved by them! (2 Cor. x. 4). Jesus retains in His own hands the influences that make the truth effectual (John xiv. 16; Matt. iii. 11).

5. *The inherent vitality of religion encourages the hope of its final prevalence.* Religion is in the world—that is something. Religion, though long opposed, hated, despised, is not extinguished! Had Divine truth been capable of being crushed by power, it would have been crushed long since—by the giants before the Flood, by the Pharaohs of Egypt, by the monarchs of Babylon, by ancient Rome under the Cæsars (H. E. I. 643, 1165).

6. *The agencies of Providence are constantly going on to prepare the world for the truth, and to send the truth to the world* (H. E. I. 979, 4029, 4030).

III. LESSONS.

1. Hope much for the world from Christianity. 2. Cordially co-operate with all who love the Gospel. 3. Act as though all depended on your individual exertion. 4. Be sure you are on the right side yourselves.—*Samuel Thodey.*

Assuming, what the context abundantly confirms, that this is spoken of our Lord and Saviour, we have here a prophetic picture of the constancy which characterised our Redeemer in pursuing His work on earth. It has been common enough for the Christian pulpit to discuss "the final perseverance of the *saints*;" it may not be amiss, for once, to consider the "final perseverance of their *Saviour*."

I. THE FACT OF HIS PERSEVERANCE IN THE WORK WHICH HIS FATHER GAVE HIM TO DO.

1. *The fact implies His true humanity.* If He were not "very man" as well as very God," we could hardly speak of His persevering. 2. *It also bids us behold Him pursuing His glorious enterprise.* It was a *unique* as well as a

noble spectacle. It was verily "a new thing in the earth." The world had had its warriors, statesmen, judges, kings, patriarchs, poets, and prophets; but in His purpose this "Servant" of God differed from them all.

II. THE DIFFICULTY OF HIS PERSEVERANCE.

To realise this we must remember that He was "the *man* Christ Jesus." 1. He was *almost alone* in His great work. Often He felt that only "the Father was with Him," so out of joint was He with all around Him (John xvi. 32). 2. He was *very poor;* and a man is *heavily weighted* in doing a great work if he is very poor. 3. *His views were unpopular.* In His principles and practices He ran counter to all parties in the Church and State, and especially was He out of accord with the religious thought and people of His day. He carried on His great work not only without any such aid, but in the teeth of a strong and united opposition. 4. *His own family derided Him* (John vii. 5). No light thing or trifling hindrance. 5. *He had recreant followers.* Some evinced pride, some anger, some ambition, some fear; one was covetous, most were ignorant and carnal, one denied Him shockingly, another betrayed Him foully, while "all forsook Him and fled." What a trial and difficulty this was to the Master to have such weak human elements in His chosen companions we can never fully know. 6. He was *terribly tempted;* and this, I take it, was by far the worst of all. *Really* tempted "in all points as we are;" *terribly* tempted, for "He suffered" through it. After this brief review who will dare to say Christ's difficulties were small or that He had nothing to discourage Him?

III. THE SUCCESS OF CHRIST'S PERSEVERANCE.

The prophecy became fact. He did not "fail" nor was He "discouraged till He had set judgment in the earth." His success is seen in the fact that—1. *He taught the truth He came to teach* (John xviii. 37). 2. *He did the work He was sent to accomplish.* He could cry at last, "It is finished." 3. *He suffered all it was necessary He should endure, even to death itself.* He was taunted and tempted to "save Himself and come down from the cross," but He would not; He persevered to the "bitter end." 4. *He showed His victory over sin and death by rising from the grave and ascending into heaven.* 5. We see *His success through His Apostles and His Church since.* Let the Pentecosts and the world-wide spread of the Gospel at the first, and the reformations and revivals of more modern times, be the proof. The remotest "islands" have not only "waited" for, but have actually and joyfully received, "His law." His success is still thus accruing, and it shall yet go on till "the whole earth shall be filled with His glory," and He has seen "of the travail of His soul" and is "satisfied."

IV. THE SECRET OF HIS PERSEVERANCE.

What was it? Let us "spoil the Egyptians" by finding the answer in the taunt of His foes. *He trusted in God!* Jesus Christ was the Greatest Believer as well as the only Saviour (John xiv. 10). His strong, and abiding, and incomparable *faith* in God is the secret of His constancy. This led Him to *pray* to God and *work* for God as none ever prayed or toiled before or since. And all for the glory of God. "I have put my Spirit upon Him," is the prophetic explanation in the context, and that of the New Testament is like unto it (John iii. 34, 35).

V. THE PRACTICAL LESSON OF HIS PERSEVERANCE.

It is twofold—1. There is *example and encouragement here for those who are Christ's followers. Example* as to how they should persevere; *encouragement* to hold on their way (Phil. i. 6). 2. *Here is also something to induce those "without" to come and live.* "He will not fail," whatever you need, "nor be discouraged," though you have done so much to make Him so. "He saveth to the uttermost." He "receiveth sinners" still.—*John Collins:*

The Study and the Pulpit, New Series, pp. 119–122.

A revelation of Christ's tenderness and constancy in His mediatorial work. Perseverance is a high virtue.

I. *The work in which the Saviour is engaged.* It is described as "setting judgment in the earth." Denotes the benevolence and rectitude of His undertaking. It is no selfish work—no attempt to overreach and destroy His enemies. But He saw that the laws of God had been set aside in this earth, &c., and He came to correct these flagrant evils, and restore the world to purity and peace.

II. *The discouragements that rise up before Him.* The assurance that He will not fail nor be discouraged implies that He will meet with much to discourage Him, and His work will be inconceivably difficult and painful. This was verified all through His personal residence on earth. In what state did He find the world? 1. Sin. 2. Selfishness—a cold individualism.

III. *The victory that will eventually crown His cause.* The assurance of this fact rests not on a single passage or promise of Scripture. There shall be the triumph—1. Of the moral over the physical. 2. Of the real over the ideal. 3. Of the social over the selfish. 4. Of the true over the false.

1. Great will be the results of these mighty changes. 2. Let us take encouragement from the Saviour's example.—*J. T. Peck, D.D.: Sermons by Fifty American Preachers*, pp. 193.

I. THE OBSTACLES WHICH OUR LORD MEETS IN HIS WORK OF KINDNESS TO MAN. The assurance that the Servant of the Lord will "not fail nor be discouraged" implies that His work will be difficult and painful, and that He will meet with much to discourage Him. We might consider these obstacles as they were presented in the world He came to redeem. *His own people* were involved in such pride and earthliness, that although His advent had been amongst them the subject of prophecy during many hundreds of years, they scorned His instructions and resisted His claims (John i. 11). The *Gentile nations*, ignorant, desperately corrupt, hopeless (1 Cor. i. 21; Rom. i. 21–32; Eph. ii. 12). What a world to visit, what a race to address, what a work to accomplish! But the *world* had, and still has, to be redeemed by the redemption of *individuals*. Let us, therefore, call to mind the obstacles which any single human being presents to Christ when He comes forth in the power of His grace to seek and to save.

1. *What is the bent of his inclinations?* Whither run his affections? What is the tendency of his will? Of what character are his moral instincts? He is an earthly creature. He may be more or less intellectual in his pursuits, but he is still earthly and sensual. He desires earthly things as the means of his enjoyment. He lives to himself, not to his Maker. Unholy selfishness is the principle which puts into motion his activity in all its forms. Yet he has the most exalted conceptions of his personal merits and security. What obstacles are here to Christianity, to the salvation offered by Christ! what strongholds must be demolished, what fierce animosities must be subdued, ere the dominion of Christ can be established in any human soul!

2. Consider *the indisposedness of man to receive instruction.* How vast is the influence of all this pride and worldliness upon the mind. Its distinctions of good and evil are confounded, the understanding is blinded, the affections are enslaved. Man has no disposition honestly to seek the truth or to retrace his steps to the paths of godliness (Prov. xiv. 12; John iii. 20). The approach of spiritual light is painful to him. Religious instruction alarms rather than delights his mind. The corrupt heart resists the admission of God's claims (Ps. lviii. 3–5). We love the sounds that lull, and the counsels which gratify our passions (H. E. I. 2669–2679).

2. Observe *the use which we make of instruction when actually received.* With what unequal steps do we advance along the paths of heavenly science! Into how many by-roads do we turn! What inconsistency and irresolution are visible in our daily conduct! How prone to let go the truth and to take up error! What dulness to discern, and what indolence to pursue, the whole will and counsel of God!

Let these facts be considered, and the obstacles in the way of Christ will appear insuperably great.

II. THE PATIENCE AND TENDERNESS WITH WHICH HE MEETS ALL THESE OBSTACLES.

With what constancy He pursues His gracious object amid all the difficulties by which it is encompassed! He counted the cost ere He engaged in the work of redemption; He fully understood the human heart, and had anticipated all the baseness of its ingratitude; and therefore nothing could turn Him away from the fulfilment of the errand of mercy on which He came (Heb. xii. 2, 3). He remains the same, unchanged in His counsels of peace, unwearied in His efforts to enlighten and to save. And not in vain. His religion has overthrown the polytheism of ancient nations. Into how many a cold, reluctant, rebellious heart has His Gospel at length forced its way, and shed a late though lasting peace over the tumults of conscience and the perturbations of passion! *What a history of forbearance and compassion on the part of Christ would the secret but detailed memoirs of individual believers compose!*

III. THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPHS OF HIS GRACE. "He will not fail nor be discouraged." Viewed separately, many events may appear contradictory to His purpose; but, under the silent and strong control of an unseen Agency, the complicated system of this world's occurrences in really "working together for good" (H. E. I. 4024, 4030).

1. Numerous as are the strongholds of idolatry and superstition, truth shall yet brighten every land, and religion have dominion over a willing and converted world (Rev. xi. 15; H. E. I. 979, 1166–1168, 2541, 4829, 4831).

2. It is in reference to the completion of Christ's work of love upon the individual heart that the subject assumes to us the deepest interest. If towards His redeemed servant, notwithstanding all his inconstancy, our Lord has hitherto been compassionate and indulged, it is with the intention to cleanse him from all iniquity. It is a consideration full of comfort for an honest mind which trembles under a sense of weakness and unworthiness, that redemption is a settled and deliberate plan of mercy to bless the wretched and save the lost; that Christ is the Mediator of an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; and that God has connected the manifestation of His own glory with the deliverance of His people from the captivity of sin. To what conclusion do these considerations bring me? To love my Benefactor more warmly, and to throw myself afresh into the combat with evil (1 John iv. 4; Rom. viii. 37; Jude 24; H. E. I. 1070).—*Hon. Gerard T. Noel, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 142–158.

Introduction.—Briefly give the spirit of verses 1–3, dwelling especially on the greatness of the work to be done, as contrasted with the apparent feebleness of the means to be employed.

I. The hopeful spirit of this Servant of Jehovah. Draw attention to the discouragements arising from the *character* of the work, and to the *hindrances* alike in the world, the Church, and the individual. The tendency of workers to lose heart, to grow "weary in well-doing." The effect of this losing heart on the *quality* of the work and its *efficiency.*

Two things essential to *hopeful* working—1. Faith in truth. 2. Faith in the possibility of accomplishing the work (H. E. I. 1928–1931; P. D. 1162, 1176).

See both these in the Servant of

Jehovah. 1. His trust in God; in God's word, "it shall not return void;" His calm outlook and untroubled mind, giving dignity and power to every word He spake. 2. His unbounded faith in the power of the Gospel to subdue and save men; in the ultimate triumph of the truth.

II. This spirit of hopefulness is essential to all successful working for Christ. Give illustrations of the power of faith to quicken and inspire, and also to generate faith in others. Luther's words have been said to be "half battles." Men felt that he believed in the truth he proclaimed, and had no doubts as to the ultimate issue. Trace this hopeful spirit in the life and work of the Apostles, and of some of the most successful workers for Christ. Contrast the jubilant love of scientific workers in our time with the Elijah-like depression among Christians. They are on the scent of the truth; their past successes embolden them to hope for greater things. Sometimes they may be over-confident, yet their spirit inspires others. So let Christians be *hopeful*. Give illustrations of the well-grounded character of *hope* here. As the Jew could look back upon his eventful history, bright with tokens of Divine favour and power, so we can look back to the triumphs of the past, *e.g.*, *success of mission work in nineteenth century;* some recent triumphs of Christianity showing that the power is the same.

Close by urging the importance of faith in Christ, in His promises, and in the power of the Gospel to save men and nations (H. E. I. 1161–1168). — *J. Fordyce, M.A.: The Preacher's Monthly*, vol. i. p. 20.

Is Christianity a Failure?

xlii. 4. *He shall not fail nor be discouraged, &c.*

In these days we often hear it said that Christianity is a failure; and on this theme many pens have been employed and many addresses have been made. As if foreseeing this state of mind, two thousand five hundred years ago the prophet took up his harp and sung these sweet notes, saying, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." These words apply to the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. xii. 18).

I. *The purpose of Christ is the conquest of this world; and, in carrying out this great work, He is not to fail or be discouraged until He has set judgment in the earth*—that is, until the system of truth which He teaches is everywhere understood; until the principles of all government shall be brought into harmony with His Word, and men everywhere shall understand and practise the great lessons of truth and holiness.

II. Men are very ready to say that this purpose must be a failure; for—1. *The project is so vast, that it seems to man impossible.* There have been great kingdoms set up on this earth of ours, but there was never a kingdom which reached to its utmost bounds. But this purpose is to found a kingdom embracing all lands, taking in its vast sweep of authority all nations of all languages and of all customs. And not only for a time, but enduring through all ages. Such a project seems to man impossible.

2. Men think Christianity must be a failure *because the agencies seem to them inadequate.* If the earth is to be conquered, they look for the sword, for vast armies, for the employment of agencies vast-reaching and of vast compass. But Christ sent forth His disciples to conquer this world, saying simply, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

3. Men say Christianity is a failure *because it has not accomplished its work.* More than fifty generations have risen and gone down, and as yet not half the population of this earth has been reached. And how can it be that this earth is to be conquered since in eighteen centuries so little, comparatively, of this work has been done?

4. They tell us that Christianity is

likely to be a failure because, they say, *there is a conflict between science and religion.* They tell us that the advance of science has shown errors in the accounts of the Bible; that the Bible has become effete; that the system of Christianity has served its day; that we must look for something grander, and nobler, and stronger to call and hold the attention of the human mind.

III. It is one of the favoured expressions of these men who fancy Christianity is a failure, that in the order of this world there shall be the "survival of the fittest"—that the weaker shall pass away, and the stronger and the mightier shall remain. Now, if we contrast Christianity with other forms of religion, where shall we find its failure? We may say to-day, simply as a fact, that it still remains, and, surpassing any other system in its strength and beauty, we shall see its survival over all.

Compare it with *paganism.* Not that low, degrading paganism we find among the Indians of our continent or the tribes of Africa, but paganism in its palmiest hours—in the days of the philosophy of Greece and of the power of Rome, when its temples shone with splendour, when its poets sang with grace, when sculpture and architecture gathered around it their forms of beauty. Scepticism then doubted and denied; but all the scepticism of Greece or Rome never closed one temple, never dethroned one of their imaginary deities. In the midst of scepticism popular faith went right on, and the temples had their devotees and worshippers. Judaism taught the knowledge of the one true God, yet it made no advances against idolatry. But what sceptical philosophy and Judaism could not do, Christianity has accomplished. Men without earthly power, men persecuted, men in prison, men reproached, went telling the story of a living and dying and ascended Christ, and as they told this story, the temples became deserted and the idols fell, until to-day there is not a god worshipped on earth that was worshipped in the time of the philosophy and glory of Greece and Rome.

Compare it with *Brahmanism*—a system that has much in it that is beautiful, with many of its precepts sublime, and many of its declarations grand. We have India brought up under this system, and what is it? I have not time to dwell on its suffering, darkness, and degradation. Two hundred millions of the people of India, with their Brahmanism, are controlled by less than thirty millions of Englishmen, who used to be on an island just at one extremity of the earth. Why? How? Because the system fails to develop men. Because Christianity does develop manhood, and gives its strength to power.

Compare Christianity with the *teachings of Confucius*, as we find them embodied in the Chinese. Voltaire, Volney, and others spoke of the wonderful influence of this form of heathenism, and made some of us think, in our earlier hours, there was something grand in the system. But what are the results of the teachings of Confucius? What kind of men do they produce? What is the result of the teaching? China, with her four thousand years or more on her head, is bowing to young America, and sending her sons here to be educated. Japan, by her side, is asking for our teachers and our schools. Japan is the object of a resurrection; for to-day in Japan the Bible is becoming the text-book in some of the schools, and the young people are beginning to see the light and the glory that emanate from Christianity.

On the principle of the survival of the fittest, is Christianity a failure? Paganism has gone, Brahmanism is going, and Confucianism is going down. Christianity is just raising herself. Oh, I see her! There is beauty on her brow; there is lustre in her eye; there is glory on her cheek. I see her stepping on the mountains, passing over the plains; I see her with wide-open hand distributing blessings on the sons of men. She is yet young. The dew of youth is yet upon her, and

she comes as an angel, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto men.

But there is *infidelity!* Yes; and what is infidelity? It is a negation; it has no system. Where are its temples, its schools, its hospitals? What did it ever try to do for man anywhere, or at any time, as an organised system? There was one nation, and only one, that ever tried this system of infidelity. France decreed, "There is no God, and death is an eternal sleep," and the result was that the streets of Paris ran with blood. Society was upheaved from its very foundations, and men were glad to go back even to poor temples, for the sake of finding some relief from the error and terror into which infidelity had thrown them. Infidelity has had its era. Voltaire said he lived in the "twilight of Christianity;" and so he did. But it was not, as he fancied, a twilight deepening into darkness, it was a twilight opening up into the brighter day; and the Sun of Righteousness shines now in spiritual beauty over our entire world. England, a century ago or more, was under the dominion of infidelity. The result was a degradation of morals and of general society. But as a reaction there came forth those works of Butler and Godwin, and a host of others who defended the principles of Christianity. And we have to-day a purer and clearer and stronger Christianity because of those attacks of infidelity. But who survived? Where are the infidels of that day? Where are their writings? They have scarcely left a mark. But Christian Churches are all over England and America.

The times are full of promise. I look over the earth, and nearly everything is hopeful. Christianity is growing stronger. It is visiting heathen nations and raising man to his full height of stature before the throne of God. Where are our discoverers? Where are our inventors? Where sit power, wealth, and learning? In Christian lands. All these are gathering around Christianity, and they make us hopeful for the future. We have our mission stations; we have our Bible translated. Our missionaries know the way to the very ends of the earth, and there have been more converts this year than in any other year since the Gospel was preached in Galilee. No danger of Christianity falling. No! Dispel all fear. There is no danger of Christianity. It is standing securely. The glory of God is on it. In the last days there shall be scoffers walking in their own ungodly lusts. If there were no scoffers at Christianity, I might doubt its truth. I know there are such scoffers, and I hear them around; but they are few and far between. A lecturer might come and occupy a hall, but the churches are full. There are crowds of the nations gathering around the Cross, and the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ is atracting more and more (H. E. I. 979, 1166–1168).—*Bishop Simpson: Christian Age*, vol. xix. pp. 115–117.

Some say Christianity is a failure—others that it will never convert the world. Take the text as replying to both. Two standpoints to view the text—

I. *That occupied by the prophet himself.* Seven hundred years before Christ. So his predictions, as well as all that was written concerning Him, had to cover that space. From Isaiah's standpoint, He shall not fail—1. To appear as the promised and predicted Messiah. From the Fall He had been promised. He did not fail as to time, place, or manner. 2. In the great offices and work He would fulfil. Teacher, Prophet, Priest, and Lord. 3. Notwithstanding the opposition and sorrows of His life. 4. To survive and set up His kingdom. Hence His resurrection. Preached in Jerusalem. Reigns in the midst of His enemies. Triumphs of His grace.

II. First Church did not fail. Success everywhere. Now *let us take our stand in our own age, and see some reasons for reiterating the declaration of the prophet.*

He shall not fail, 1. To overcome all the opposition of His enemies. None more bitter than the past, or more formidable. Recent victories.

2. To attain the universal dominion. The grounds of this are manifold. (1.) The divine covenant (Isa. liii. 10 and 11, with Phil. ii. 6). (2.) The divinely repeated prophecies and declarations (Ps. ii. 6, lxx. 17; Hab. ii. 14). (3.) The efficacy and sufficiency of the Gospel. (4.) The impossibility of Christ's failure. As the Divine, &c. The failure of Christ would be the triumph of ignorance, &c.

CONCLUSION.—The world has been full of failures. Christ never fails to be all that sinners need. Labour on and in hope. How futile all opposition. Emmanuel's victories will be sung for ever.—*J. Burns, D.D., LL.D.: Sketches and Outlines*, p. 228.

THE PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY.

xlii. 4. *He shall not fail nor be discouraged, &c.*

Besides meeting its fulfilment in the ministry of Christ on earth, the text is fulfilled in Christianity, regarded as the Spirit of Christ moving in the world. Moving noiselessly, almost unperceived, Christianity was to accomplish the establishment of a universal kingdom.

I. **The progress of Christianity shall continue until the principles of Christ's Kingdom pervade the entire globe.** In human affairs there are oftentimes failures and discouragements. In nature, in all the works of God, and in all the history of man, there are periods of progress and periods of retrogression. Men change their plans and try new instrumentalities; but "He shall not fail nor be discouraged," or, as the margin reads, "broken;" that is, His plans shall not be broken or changed; and He shall not be discouraged, but shall wait until the great work shall be accomplished (Heb. x. 12, 13). His perseverance is indomitable.

II. **But there is a modern tendency to speak of the failure of Christianity.** Men speak of the failure of Christianity, "It is not answering its great design; some other system must take its place; Christianity will become one of the world's past institutions," &c. The cry comes to-day from the literary circle; from men of scientific pretensions. The youth of the land are taught to expect something better and higher than Christianity.

III. **In what direction do indications around us point?** *It is thought that Christianity attempts too much.* "It suits us and our civilisation; Mohammedanism suits a certain part of the earth better; Buddhism suits India," &c. But is not the tendency of civilisation everywhere to bring man up to one great standard? (1.) It is so in the material world. (2.) All the discoveries of science are leading us to see a wonderful unity—a unity in all varieties—a unity in the heaven above us. (3.) The whole human family is yet to be one brotherhood. If this be so, one religious tie is needed to bind all hearts together to the Father above. (4.) Difference in the religious sentiment will give rise to varieties of taste, varieties in our modes of worship, &c.; but there will be one great revelation of faith.

2. *It is thought that the agency is wholly inadequate to accomplish the work proposed.* Men still imagine that the preaching of the Cross is foolishness. "How can it change national customs and institutions?" But the same men talk about the power of thought, about the control of the human mind. Christianity is emphatically a religion of thought. It proposes to conquer, not by the sword, but by entering into the mind of man, transforming his whole being, and changing, by this means, the order of society. Remember (1.)—*The power of thought.* It has changed the face of nature; revolutionised empires. Primarily, there is

no power in the universe but thought. God thought: "He spake, and it was done," &c. It is Christian thought that is to conquer the world. Christ is represented as having a two-edged sword proceeding out of His mouth. (2.) *Every man that receives Christianity seeks to communicate it.* It is like the spread of fire (H. E. I. 1162). When we think what Christianity promises, and the unseen spiritual influences that act in harmony with it to give it efficiency, we find the means adequate.

IV. The sure future of Christianity. 1. Christianity has already made a great change; and the future conquests of the earth, so far as we can see, will come under the control of the Christian nations (H. E. I. 1161). 2. Christianity has this peculiarity, that it takes up childhood in its arms. Infidelity and Paganism neglect childhood. "Give me the rising generation, and you give me the world." 3. Out of the work Christianity is doing there comes a feeling of peace. The principle of arbitration is spreading among the Christian nations of the earth. Such is the blessing of Christianity to men. It shall not fail; for our great Leader is at the right hand of the throne; the power of the Father is His.—*Bishop Simpson: Clerical World*, vol. i. pp. 290–292.

The Oneness of God in Revelation and in Nature.

xlii. 5, 6. *Thus saith God the Lord, &c.*

Ver. 5 is a description of God; ver. 6, a declaration of His purposes. The sentiment is that the God of nature is the God also of redemption.

Assuming the truth of the identity of the Author of nature with the God of revelation, consider certain lessons which follow as corollaries from it:—

I. That religious investigation should be characterised by the spirit of docile inquiry. Want of humility vitiates the methods by which men form their religious opinions. In science, it is settled that docility of inquiry is the one spirit which can lead to scientific discovery; in religion many feel at liberty to create their opinions. Especially is the faith which men think they derive from revelation often formed arrogantly. We bring to it a burden of habits of mind, of purposes of life, of usages in society, of the demands of science, the necessities of philosophy, and of authorities in theology. Pursuing our researches thus, we do not discover our facts; we make them (H. E. I. 558, 559). What is the reception which the civilised world now gives to the old astronomy of the Ptolemies, which mapped out the heavens like a Chinese atlas? The truth which we infer as indisputable from the fact of the oneness of the God of nature with the God of revelation is that the disclosures of God in the one should be received in the same spirit as the disclosures of God in the other.

II. That in revealed theology will be found a definite and positive system of truth. Side by side with Christian dogmatism there grows up a Christianised scepticism within the range of Scriptural thought. On the one hand, it is claimed that a revelation *shall* teach *this;* and on the other, that this revelation, properly speaking, can *teach* nothing. We begin with inquiry, we end with inquiry. It is refreshing to turn to the confidence with which, in the natural sciences, men express their convictions. How courageous is the etymology of the very word "science!" It *is* power, because it is knowledge. It even believes that it knows things which are not demonstrable. But our God is one God. We must look for a theology which is a system, not of inquiries, but of answers. We must presume, especially, that in the Book of God we shall come upon certain verities which shall be patent to unperverted inquiry. We do not so much find them as they find us. They come home to the heart of a child as readily as to that of a sage,

just as the facts of nature do. Moreover, we must presume that these Scriptures contain a theology that can be positively preached. It must be free from self-contradictions, as other sciences are, so that an athletic faith can use it. It must be such as can show its strength in its methods of working; such as can penetrate and agitate and instrumentally regenerate souls.

III. That the facts of these two departments of God's working will never contradict each other. The trial which Christianity has undergone from its imagined conflict with the discoveries of science *has* now a history. The history of science confirms the faith which we should cherish, that there is a oneness of God in revelation and in nature. Science itself has established it as an axiom that there are no insulated departments of inquiry. When men think they discover in nature something antagonistic to revelation, we may safely reply, as did the three men at the mouth of the furnace, "We are not careful to answer thee," &c. (Dan. iii. 16, 17).

IV. That we should expect to find the revealed government of God to be a system characterised by sacredness and uniformity of law. In the natural world we find no such thing as caprice. Disease, even, has laws which are as beautiful in their operation as the laws of health. Law in nature,—Decree in religion. The two revolve around each other like twin stars; both are developments of one truth—that God acts by plan, and not by caprice (Matt. x. 29, 30).

V. That from the unity of God in nature and in revelation we have reason to expect the occurrence of mysteries in a revealed theology. Science, in the world of matter, is thwarted in all its investigations, sooner or later, by insoluble mysteries; and just so, and no otherwise, is it with certain problems in religion. Nor is it any more marvellous that revealed theology does not solve such problems in the one realm of thought, than that natural science does not in the other. Is the connection of the race with Adam one of the hard sayings of a revealed theology? But is it more easy of solution that the vices of a father become a poison in the veins of his children and children's children?

VI. That from the oneness of God in nature and revelation we may infer a confirmation of our faith in the certainty of this world's conversion to Christianity. The creation of this world and its redemption are, in a truthful sense, parallel acts of omnipotence. It is as certain that the one will occur as that the other has occurred. The necessity of law in nature, —the certainty of law in redemption. The heart is in the hand of the Lord *as* the rivers of water; He turneth it whithersoever He will. Who has not observed the profusion with which the natural world is made emblematic, in the prophetic Scriptures, of the final triumphs of the Gospel? (chap. lv. 10, 11, lx. 21; Ps. lxxii. 16; Isa. xxxv. 2, ii. 2, lxvi. 12, xi. 9; Ps. lxxii. 7, 17; Isa. lx. 6, 7, xi. 6–8). The mountains, &c., become not only the emblems, but the pledges of the mighty works which He *will* do for man's recovery. —*Austin Phelps, D.D.: Exegete and Homiletic Monthly*, vol. i. pp. 281–292.

Called in Righteousness.

xlii. 5–8. *Thus saith God the Lord, &c.*

Some of the most wonderful words ever uttered. It is God speaking to His own Son. It is as if we were secretly admitted into the counsel of God.

I. God provided the Saviour. "I have called Thee in righteousness"—I have asked Thee to do this work of righteousness; to work out this salvation, which shall show me to be a

righteous God. God did, as it were, look round all the creatures to see whom He would call to this great work. But He chose His Son. None other could be a sufficient Saviour.

II. God upheld the Saviour. "I will hold," &c. The figure seems taken from a father and his little child. When God called His Son to the work, it could not but be a fearful work in His eyes. God here comforts His Son under the view. Learn—(1.) How dreadful the sufferings of Christ were. (2.) The greatness of your sins. (3.) God's great hand in Christ's work.

III. God gave Christ for a covenant. Gave Him away to be a covenant Saviour to the people and a light to lighten the Gentiles. The Son was infinitely dear to the Father. Sinners were infinitely vile in the sight of the Father. Yet, "I will give Thee!" Learn—(1.) The intense love of God for sinners. (2.) That God must have the glory of their redemption.

IV. God gave Christ for a light. 1. By nature men have blind eyes. 2. Are bound in prison. 3. Sit in a dark prison-house. A change comes through the gift of God.

CONCLUSION.—Has Christ been made to rise upon your soul? Plead with God to fulfil His word.—*R. M. M'Cheyne: Additional Remains*, pp. 61, &c.

THE COVENANT OF GRACE ESTABLISHED IN CHRIST.

xlii. 6. *I will give Thee for a covenant of the people.*

These words are repeated by the prophet (ch. xlix. 8). There are three things which have affinity one to another, and yet differ one from another —a purpose, a promise, a covenant. A purpose differs from a promise and a covenant, in that it lays no obligation upon a man. A promise lays an obligation upon him who makes it. There is in every covenant a mutual promise and stipulation between the parties covenanting, whereby they are equally bound each to other in certain articles and agreements consented to by both. Consider, then—

I. WHAT COVENANT IS HERE MEANT.

There are covenants between men and men. Abimelech and Abraham made a covenant (Gen. xxi. 32); Jacob and Laban (Gen. xxxi. 44). Such are called civil covenants. There are also religious covenants, of which two have become famous. One of these was made in the state of man's innocency (Gen. ii. 16, 17). In this, God promised to Adam, for himself and his posterity, life and happiness, upon the condition of perfect and perpetual obedience. This is called the covenant of works. The other was made after the Fall (Gen. iii. 15); it was renewed with Abraham (Gen. xii. 3), and with Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 4), and with Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 14). In this covenant eternal life is promised to man upon the condition of faith in Christ. The apostle calls it "the law of faith" (Rom. iii. 27). It is of this the text speaks. Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, had nothing to do in the first. It was *fœdus amicitiæ*. God and Adam were perfect friends when it was made. That of which Christ is Mediator was made to bring man to life and salvation, after his sinful violation of the first covenant.

II. WHO THIS PEOPLE IS TO WHOM CHRIST IS GIVEN AS A COVENANT.

By "the people" we are to understand the people of Israel. These are principally mentioned for three reasons. 1—*Because Christ, according to His human nature, descended from them* (Rom. i. 3; Isa. xi. 1). 2. *Because this covenant of grace was first made with them* (Rom. ix. 4). 3. *Because when Christ should come in the flesh, this covenant was first to be pressed upon them* (Matt. x. 5, 6, xv. 24). Still, the promise of Christ to Abraham extends to the elect of all nations (Gen. xii. 3).

III. IN WHAT RESPECTS CHRIST IS CALLED A COVENANT OF THE PEOPLE.

1. He is the *Head of the covenant.* Adam was the head of the covenant of works; Christ, the second Adam, is the

Head of the covenant of grace. He is *caput electionis;* and He is *caput fœderis,* in whom all the elect are *fœderati,* entered into covenant with God. Fallen man was unmeet to enter into covenant immediately with the holy God. All the promises of God are in Christ (2 Cor. i. 20).

2. He is the *Purchaser and Procurer of the covenant.* We read of the "blood of the testament" (Heb. ix. 20; Isa. liii. 10).

3. He is the *Sum and Substance of the covenant.* Take Christ out of it, and it will be but an empty thing; He is its Alpha and its Omega, its very pith and kernel.

4. He is the *Messenger of the covenant* (Mal. iii. 1). He published it of old by the prophets (1 Pet. i. 11), and afterwards in His own person (Eph. ii. 17); when He was ascended, by the apostles (Mark xvi. 15); and still by the ministry instituted by Him to continue to the end of the world (2 Cor. v. 18, 19).

5. He is the *Surety of the covenant* (Heb. vii. 22). He undertakes on God's part that all that He hath promised shall be made good to the believer. (1.) By His Word (John v. 24). (2.) By the shedding of His blood. His blood was poured out to ratify the covenant. (3.) By the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. One end of these is to confirm the covenant; they are both outward seals of the covenant. (4.) By His Spirit. The Spirit is a *sealing* as well as a sanctifying Spirit (1 Cor. ii. 12). And Christ is a Surety on our part. He undertakes that we shall close with the covenant, and that we shall walk according to it (Eph. iv. 11–13; 2 Cor. iv. 13; Rom. i. 4).

CONCLUSION.—1. The whole business of our salvation centres in Christ Jesus. Who can express the strong, rich comfort which springs out of this to all that have an interest in Christ?

2. Let the unbeliever be warned that the covenant of peace is built on Christ. He that hath not Christ hath not the covenant; out of Christ, out of the covenant (Eph. ii. 12).—*Ralph Robinson: Sermons,* pp. 462–479.

He who is promised as the chief matter, the mediator, surety, scope of the covenant, is by a metonymy called "the covenant." "I will give Thee for a covenant;" that is, I covenant to give Thee to the people. Jesus is granted in the covenant to bring us to God. To which blessed and glorious purposes He is exhibited—

I. AS THE LIGHT OF LIFE (Luke ii. 32; John i. 4, viii. 12). There is a light that serves to kill and destroy, to bring death and condemnation to light: the light of the law, that killing letter concerning which the apostle says (Rom. vii. 9, 10). But Christ brings life and immortality to light (2 Cor. iv. 6; John xiv. 8, 9, xvii. 3).

II. AS THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. This is His name (Jer. xxiii. 6). To this end He is given to us—1. As our propitiatory sacrifice (1 John ii. 2; Rom. iii. 25). 2. As a merciful and faithful High Priest (Heb. ii. 17, ix. 24; Exod. xxviii. 12, 29; Heb. xii. 24; 1 John ii. 1, 2; Rom. viii. 33, 34). Not only a righteous, but a merciful High Priest, that is provided with a sacrifice, and hath a heart to offer (Heb. v. 2). No dignity to which He is exalted can make Him forget His friends (2 Tim. ii. 13).

III. AS OUR LORD AND KING (Zech. ix. 9; Isa. ix. 6). God hath more care of His saints than to leave the government of them on their shoulder. He is a King to *gather* them, to *govern* them, to *defend and save* them (Matt. i. 21). Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King,

IV. AS OUR HEAD AND HUSBAND (Eph. i. 22, 23; 1 Cor. xi. 3). Believers are joined to the Lord (1 Cor. vi. 17; Col. ii. 19). They are married to Christ (2 Cor. xi. 2). From this union follows:—1. A communication of influences (Col. ii. 3, i. 19). This fulness of Christ is ours, and for us (John i. 16; Col. iii. 3). 2. A complication of interests. Christ and His saints are mutually concerned. They

have nothing but through Him; their whole tenure is in the Head; and whatsoever is His is theirs—His God His Father, His merits, &c.—*R. Alleine: God's Covenant Grant*, pp. 24–36.

The word "covenant" stands in the centre of this passage (vers. 5–8), and we may well conclude, on a consideration of the whole context, that the idea of covenant is central also in meaning. In (ver. 5) we are reminded of God's creative, providential, and sustaining energy, as manifested in the material universe and in the region of human souls. From this elementary truth we are led on to the deep secret which God is ever unfolding in His revelations of mercy and saving love. The whole passage teaches us—

I. THAT JEHOVAH, WHO IS THE KING OF THE UNIVERSE, IS ALSO THE KING OF GRACE. Ver. 5 sublimely expresses His supremacy over nature and man, and is suggestive—1. Of what He teaches us in astronomy ("He that created the heavens and stretched them out"). 2. Of what He teaches us in geology, botany, and related sciences ("He that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it"). 3. Of what He teaches us in the history of nations ("He that giveth breath," &c.; comp. Acts xvii. 25). So also is He supreme in the empire of souls—in the work of redeeming as well as of creating. His glory in this respect cannot be shared by another (ver. 8). He is the Originator of all saving methods, and the Source of all spiritual fulness.

II. THAT HIS PURPOSES IN THE DOMAIN OF GRACE ARE EQUALLY REAL AND SURE AS THOSE IN THE SPHERE OF NATURE. He disdains not to make a *covenant* with the people. His gracious intentions are not capricious, haphazard, accidental, or in any way partaking of the nature of after-thought. They are of the nature of a covenant—a divine purpose, treasured up and unfolded in the course of the ages. Modern science loves to trace the invariability of natural laws. Christian theism, also, accepts the teaching as proof of the divine veracity. In nature and in grace we learn of a covenant-keeping God. Indeed, the one is but an illustration of the other. (See Jer. xxxi. 36, xxxiii. 25, 26; Isa. lv. 10, 11.)

III. THAT THE DIVINE COVENANT IS SPECIALLY ATTESTED. God would have us *know*, beyond all mistake, that He is covenanting with us. 1. The earlier forms of pledge were given in the special selection of the Jewish nation to bear testimony for Him. 2. The crowning pledge of His covenant is afforded us in the gift of Christ. Only in Him do the words of vers. 6, 7 find their true fulfilment.

IV. THAT THE DIVINE COVENANT HAS RESPECT TO ALL NATIONS AND PEOPLES. For the blind and self-righteous Jew of ancient times, or the hard and unsympathetic dogmatist of modern times, to regard the covenant as expressive of an exclusive compact by which a vast portion of mankind was to be shut out from God's pitying favour, is to mistake its significance. This is to turn a sublime truth into a keynote of caprice and unworthy favouritism. It is a "covenant of the people, a light of the Gentiles" (ver. 6), that is here indicated. So the earliest form of the promise was comprehensive, and looked onward to an all-inclusive plan (see Gen. xii. 3). We see in Jehovah's covenant, then, a basis of redemption for all men, an offer of saving help to every sinner of every race.—*William Manning.*

THE GREAT NAME.

xlii. 8. *I am the Lord: that is my name.*

The names and titles of the Almighty, which convey ideas of overwhelming greatness and glory mingled with awful mysteriousness, are most worthy of our best attention.

I. THE NAME BY WHICH GOD HAS GRACIOUSLY REVEALED HIMSELF.

Our translators have only retained the word JEHOVAH four times out of 6855 instances in which it occurs in the original Hebrew. Seldom, if ever, used by the Jews after the Babylonish captivity; on account of their great reverence for the Divine Being, they substituted *Adonai*—Lord; and their example was followed by our translators, who, out of respect to this feeling, have almost invariably rendered it Lord, always, however, directing it to be printed in capitals, to denote that the original word is JEHOVAH, and to distinguish it from every other name.

Its derivation and meaning. The incommunicable name. Ps. lxxxiii. 18 accords with this declaration. In two instances we have God's own interpretation of this great name (Exod. iii. 14, xxxiv. 6, 7, more fully interpreted). In the former instance He announced Himself to Moses in the glory of His self-existent and eternal majesty, as "I AM;" in the latter, in the glory of His grace and goodness—the most ample and particular description of the Divine character, as given by Himself, in the sacred records.

It also denotes God's special relation of love and care to His people. The covenant name. He is the *God* of all flesh, but He is the JEHOVAH of His people (Ps. lxviii. 4). If we would rejoice before the Lord, we must contemplate Him in the special relation of love and care. Our comfort very much depends upon the views we cherish of our God. The splendour of His attributes cannot of itself awaken joy. Trusting in Him, through Christ, as our JEHOVAH—an unchangeable Lord of purpose and promise—gives comfort, and we can view His glorious perfections with holy, chastened joy, that softens down to adoring love. For, Heb. vi. 17, 18. Our hearts can only find satisfaction in union with a Being such as God has revealed Himself to be.

II. THIS GREAT NAME IN UNION WITH SOME OF ITS OLD TESTAMENT COMBINATIONS.

1. JEHOVAH TSIDKENU (Jer. xxiii. 6). Jesus is not only the righteous Lord, but the Lord our righteousness. This short sentence, only two words in the Hebrew, comprises the whole Gospel. As sinners *need* a righteousness in which to stand before the Holy One, Christ's Gospel is the grand provision for the restoration of righteousness in fallen and sinful men (2 Cor. v. 21; Rom. iii. 25, 26); personal righteousness, obtained only by faith (Rom. iv. 5, v. 1, x. 3, 4).

2. JEHOVAH-SHALOM—Jehovah is peace (Judges vi. 24). The Lord speaks peace unto His people. He who is our righteousness is also our peace (Eph. ii. 14; Rom. v. 1). Our legacy (John xiv. 27).

3. JEHOVAH-NISSI—Jehovah is my banner (Exod. xvii. 15). Material warfare an emblem of the spiritual. (1.) The Church of God is a Church militant; ever at war with the kingdom of darkness. The world must be conquered for Christ. The banner of King Jesus is not placed in our hands for us to be calmly indifferent, but to inspire us with an absorbing ambition for its increase of glory. Victory is sure. (2.) Our Christian life is a battle. Not only troubles to meet and pass through, but active enemies to resist and overcome. There is no furlough and no discharge. Yet we need not fear.

4. JEHOVAH-JIREH—The Lord will provide (Gen. xxii. 14). Let this memorial of the past be our watchword for the future. The Lord will provide for us in wisdom according to our necessities (Phil. iv. 19). He has done so, and He will (Rom. viii. 32).

5. JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH—The Lord is there (Ezek. xlviii. 35). Doubtless Ezekiel has another city and another promised land in view—the Gospel church and the Heavenly Jerusalem. The Church is called "the city of the living God." The Lord is there—our joy and rejoicing—nor will He ever forsake His people. Of all the Church triumphant JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH is the chief glory and happiness. "God

Himself shall be with them, and dwell among them."

"This is their supreme delight,
And makes a heaven, a heaven."

CONCLUSION.—This Infinite Jehovah is anxious to become your Covenant Friend, and Guide, and Portion.—*Alfred Tucker.*

THE RIGHTS OF GOD MAINTAINED.

xlii. 8. *I am the Lord; that is my name, &c.*

God is jealous of His honour (Exod. xx. 2–5). The injunctions against idolatry have been repeatedly violated by all the nations of the earth: in ancient times by the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and even the Israelites; in somewhat later times by the Persians, Greeks, Romans; and every modern nation known to us is either now idolatrous or has been rescued from idolatry through the influence of Christianity. To the corrupted mind of man idolatry has peculiar charms: it gratifies his desire for outward signs; it meets his craving after the material and the visible.

The text is of vital interest to ourselves, inasmuch as every impenitent sinner and every unfaithful follower of Christ dishonours God and is chargeable with a kind of idolatry. Mark—

I. THE IMPORT OF GOD'S NAME. "I am Jehovah, that is my name."

1. It means *the Being that exists.* Of every other being, animate and inanimate, it can be affirmed that there was a time when it did not exist; but of Jehovah no such affirmation can be made (Ps. xc. 2; Isa. xl. 14).

2. It implies that He is *the fountain of all being.* A false philosophy affirms the existence of other beings independent of God, and maintains especially the eternity of matter. But such views are irrational and absurd (Jer. x. 12; Isa. xl. 26). Nor may it be affirmed that these passages imply no more than that God worked on pre-existent matter (Heb. xi. 3; H. E. I. 353–359).

3. The word signifies that God is also *the preserver of being.* He made all things for Himself—not to be abandoned to themselves and fate; but to be watched over and sustained, that the end of their creation might be fully answered (H. E. I. 362–365).

4. The name Jehovah indicates that God is *the God of Providence.* It is admitted that God operates by law; but it is as certainly His power that upholds the worlds as it would be were there no law of gravitation. The laws of nature, so called, are but the modes in which God works. Miracles show that those laws are under His control (Ps. cxlviii. 8; H. E. I. 3530–3538).

5. The sublimest feature in His Providence is that which was exhibited in the redemption of mankind. The name Jehovah leads us to this point. God is *the Saviour of the world*, since for a sinful world there could have been no preservation without redemption. In Christ the character of God as the merciful I AM is clearly manifested (John x. 14).

II. THE GLORY WHICH BELONGS TO HIM. "My glory will I not give to another," &c. The term glory is sometimes used in Scripture in reference to the visible symbol of Jehovah's presence — the Shekinah; at other times it denotes the manifestation of His power and wisdom in creation; and at other times again it is employed in a more general sense to set forth the attributes and perfections of His character. But in the text the word is equivalent to honour, worship, adoration. What, then, is the glory which belongs exclusively to God?

1. *The glory of the creation of all things* (Rev. iv. 11).

2. *The glory of the world's redemption.* The work to be achieved was not simply the redemption of mankind, but their redemption in a way consistent with the law of God. But achieved it was, and achieved by God

Himself; no angelic being aided in the enterprise, and "of the people there was none with Him."

3. *The glory of the application of redemption to the case of each individual believer in Christ Jesus* (Eph. ii. 8; Tit. iii. 5, 6). Where is boasting then? It is excluded.

4. *The glory of the advancement of mankind in knowledge, holiness, and peace.* The human race is certainly improving; and it is to Christianity we are indebted chiefly for our civil privileges, and for all our social and domestic comforts. To whom is the glory of our national greatness due? To Him by whom kings reign, to whom the wise owe their wisdom, and from whom every good and every perfect gift descends. Christianity, moreover, is the means which God employs for the world's regeneration; for though other instrumentalities may be brought into operation, they are but subordinate.

III. HIS DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN HIS RIGHTS. "*I will not* give my glory to another," &c. This declaration may be viewed as corrective—

1. Of the sin of *idolatry.* He has not given His glory to the gods of the heathen, nor will He permit their devotees to give it them. But there are forms of idolatry practised by the Christian professor. What is the worship of the Virgin Mary, of saints and martyrs, of relics and of pictures, but idolatry? And what is the inordinate love of the creature but idolatry? What is covetousness but idolatry? What is the grasping after wealth which prevails but idolatry? (1 John ii. 15).

2. Of the sin of *pride.* The proud man takes God's glory to Himself. Perhaps one reason why Christians are less useful than they might be is that they fail to give God the glory due unto His name, and would fain reserve a measure of praise for themselves (1 Sam. ii. 30).

3. Of the sin of *unbelief.* This is allied to pride. It scorns to be indebted for eternal life to grace; it will not submit to the righteousness of God. It robs God of His claims to our confidence and love; but God will not give His glory to another, and never will the terms of mercy be other than they are (Mark xvi. 16).—*Thornley Smith: Sermons by Wesleyan Ministers* (1852), pp. 172–187.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PROMISE.

xlii. 9. *Behold, the former things are come to pass, &c.*

One may observe, in reading Scripture, the general principle that God usually gives a promise of that which He means to bestow. Before Christ came the Father was continually speaking of His coming. Love meets man as a heralding fragrance before the actual bestowal of blessing.

Why are covenant blessings the subject of promises?

I. IN ORDER TO DISPLAY GOD'S GRACE.

To display—1. *The freeness of His grace.* The promise to which the text specially alludes is *to open the blind eyes, &c.* The blind referred to were not born in the days of Isaiah. God promises before we know our need or seek His face. There are many conditional promises in Scripture; but all God's promises rest on an unconditioned covenant of grace (Rom. ix. 25). 2. *The fulness of His grace.* It is unmerited; Christ died for the ungodly. 3. *The power of it.* He *will* open the blind eyes, &c. God is great in nature, but greater in grace. Man is a free agent, but he is not, and cannot be, more powerful in any respect than the Lord of all.

II. TO AROUSE OUR HOPES.

Religious inquirers should find the promises of God unspeakably precious. Some come to Christ easily, others with great difficulty; but there are promises enough in the Scriptures to call forth and stimulate hope in all (Heb. vii. 25). Christian believers.

even, need to be told of what God will do, in order, at times, to encourage their hope (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10).

III. To EXERCISE OUR FAITH.

God desires to educate our confidence in Him. If Christian truth had been made so clear that we could make an axiom of it, there would have been no room for faith. Faith could not then have been the all-important thing it is in the manward aspect of salvation. Faith is the pivot upon which Christian character turns. It is neither a hard nor a wrong thing that God requires from us.

The Lord has told us what great things He is going to do for sinners. Do we believe that He can do what He says? Do we believe in His *willingness* to do it? Then it is ours to cast ourselves upon His power and will.

IV. To EXCITE OUR PRAYER.

Prayer is sure to follow hope and faith. Note the order—first, grace, then hope, faith, prayer. Faith soon brings a man to his knees; and while he is pleading, God is hearing. All God's promises which are not fulfilled are meant to stimulate to prayer.

V. To FOSTER GRATITUDE AND ASSURANCE WHEN THE MERCY HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

Man is made glad when he sees and feels that God's Word has not returned to Him void; then comes the inference,—If He has done all this for me in the past, He will do as much for me in the future. In the next chapter the argument is, *I will do because I have done.* "I have redeemed thee; when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." This is the firm foundation for our hope, our past experience of the faithfulness of God; and strong faith is God's due.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. xxv. pp. 685–696.

GOD'S TERRIBLENESS AND GENTLENESS.

xlii. 14–16. *I will destroy and devour at once, &c.*

The measure of greatness is the measure of terribleness; constructiveness is the beneficent side of destructiveness.

The fire that warms will, if abused, reduce the palace to ashes; the river which gladdens the landscape may devastate it; the engine that bears the laughing child to his longed-for home will, if mismanaged, occasion terrible havoc; the lightning, which may be caught and utilised, can burn the forest and strike armies blind.

In the text we are confronted with the highest expression of the same truth; the Terrible One is gentler than the gentlest friend. Power belongeth unto God as well as mercy; He is either glorious as heaven or fearful as hell. The terribleness of God is the good man's security; he does not say, "I must worship Him or He will destroy me;" but, "the beneficent side of that power is all mine."

I. *Look at the doctrine of the text in relation to bad men, who pride themselves upon their success and their strength.* Daily life has always been a problem to devout wisdom; virtue has often been crushed while vice has flourished. But there is a power beyond man's; and nothing is held safely that is not held by consent of that power. God cannot be described in parts; He is to be studied in the unity of His character. Men are bound to be as common-sense in their theology as in the ordinary works of life; in building character they should be at least as sagacious as in building houses; they must build for tempestuous as well as for fine weather. We prepare for the severe side of *Nature*—why ignore the severe aspect of *God?* This is not preaching the mere terrors of the Lord; it is being simply faithful to *facts.* The so-called success of the bad man has yet to stand the strain of the Divine trial. God will examine our title-deeds. Remember, we are not stronger than our weakest point.

II. *Look at the doctrine as an en*

courageement to all men who work under the guidance of God. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not," &c. God declares Himself gentle to those who truly need Him. He promises nothing to the self-sufficient; He promises much to the needy. A true apprehension of this doctrine will give us a right view of daily providences, viz., that *men who are apparently most destitute may in reality be most richly enjoying the blessings of God.*

We ought not to overlook the beneficent law of *compensation.* Blindness may be but another condition of happiness. Defects are the express conditions on which offers of Divine help are founded; it is *because* we are blind that He will lead us. It is clear, then, that self-sufficiency on the part of man is an offence to God; not only so, it is a vexation to man himself,—all his efforts at independence end in mortification. Towards one another we are to be self-reliant; towards God we are to be humble, dependent, all-trustful. The removal of the mountains and hills that bar our way is God's own work; why should we meddle with it as if we could do it better than He? The devil says, "Be your own God," and we snatch at the suggestion as a prize. Behold! we call you to a God whose very terribleness may be turned into an assurance of safety, and whose love is infinite, unchanging, eternal!

CONCLUSION. — Men of business! Know ye that prosperity is the gift of God, and that He who gave it can also withdraw it? "I will destroy and devour it at once: I will dry up all their herbs" (Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36). Bread cannot satisfy unless it be broken by God's hands.

Children of God! ye especially who are called to suffering, and weakness, and great unrest because of manifold defect, God offers you His hand. Rest on God. Fear God, and no other fear shall ever trouble you.—*Joseph Parker, D.D.: City Temple,* pp. 227–284.

THE LEADER OF THE BLIND.

xlii. 16. *And I will bring the blind, &c.*

Christians, "ye are not as yet come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you." But thus far He has been your helper. What He has done is only a pledge of what He will do. To aid your grateful remembrance of the past and to confirm your confidence in the future, let us survey Him in three characters, which are all plainly set forth in our text.

I. AS OUR LEADER.

"*I will bring the blind by a way they know not; I will lead them in paths they have not known.*"

1. What could we do without such a Leader? Without God man is a poor wanderer on the mountains of ignorance, a prey to every danger, liable to be led astray by his prejudices and passions, certain to miss the only road to heaven.

2. Observe where He leads them: "In paths they have not known." This is true—(1.) In regard to *their temporal concerns.* He has done so. If you look back, and contemplate the bounds of your habitation as fixed by Providence, your connections formed, your friends, your successes, your disappointments, does not all this appear now surprising? And He will do so. What *can* you know of the future? (P. D. 1432, 1440). (2.) In regard to *their spiritual concerns.* They were not born Christians, but have been made such; and if now they differ from others, and from their former selves, it is because He "hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light." Once they knew nothing of conviction of sin, of hatred of sin, of faith in Christ, of prayer. And there are heights of holiness to which He will yet lead them by paths they have not now traversed.

II. AS OUR INTERPRETER.

"*I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.*"

This is clearly distinguished from the former. You may "lead the blind by a way they know not," and you may not explain it to them, but only tell them to depend upon you as a guide, while they are unconscious of anything except progress. But God illumines all whom He guides. Observe four instances in which He gradually makes "darkness light before them and crooked things straight."

1. **Doctrine** (John vii. 17; Phil. ii. 15; H. E. I. 2877, 2878, 3127).

2. **Experience.** There are many things perplexing here. (1.) *Temptations* that assail them are among the number, for they hoped to go on in their Christian course without annoyance. They did not remember that Pharaoh, as soon as Israel was gone, pursued, and tried to bring them back again. But presently He shows them that the Christian's life must be a warfare (H. E. I. 1061, 4768–4776). (2.) *Prayer.* They read that God answers prayer; they pray, but no answer comes. Very distressing. But presently He shows them that He is "a God of judgment;" that while His mercy would constrain Him to give, His wisdom leads Him to withhold the blessing for a time (H. E. I. 3897, 3898). Or if in answer to their prayers new and heavier trials are sent them, they are called presently to discern in them discipline and training for greater blessings beyond (H. E. I. 101, 2464, 2465, 3692–3695). (3.) *Joy.* They sometimes do not experience the joy of which they read. He corrects their mistakes concerning it (H. E. I. 2064–2074, 3046–3051). (4.) *Assurance.* He shows them that they are not to attach undue importance to it (H. E. I. 311–314, 321–323, 340–346). He enables them in the end to rejoice in it.

3. **Practical duties.** Such as a Christian's removal from his situation, or his transition from one business to another. In such matters the path of duty is made plain to the man who waits patiently upon God (Prov. iii. 5, 6).

4. **God's providential dealings.** God's way is sometimes in the sea, and His footsteps are not known. But sometimes the darkness is dispelled even *now*, and the Christian sees why he was exercised with such a soul-trouble. Take the case of Joseph (Gen. xlv. 5–8), or of David (Ps. cxix. 67).

III. As His people's unchangeable Friend.

"*These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.*"

1. They deserve to be forsaken, and this they will acknowledge readily enough (Lam. iii. 22).

2. They may think themselves forsaken (ch. xlix. 14; Ps. lxxvii. 7, xxxi. 22).

3. At times He may so deal with them that, in the poverty of our language, we have to speak of them as men forsaken—(1.) *In their outward condition* (Hos. v. 15). (2.) *In regard to their enjoyment of spiritual comfort* (Ps. xxx. 7, cxix. 82; H. E. I. 1260, 1261). (3.) *In giving them over to a sore conflict with temptation* (H. E. I. 4774).

But all these apparent forsakings are short (ch. liv. 7), and they are never real. Even when they can discern no trace of Him, God is still with His people (Heb. xiii. 5; Rom. viii. 35–39; see pp. 78, 79).—*William Jay. Sunday Morning Sermons*, pp. 120–129.

In relation to the movements of Divine Providence God's people are "blind."

What an infinite mercy it is for them that they have a Guide adapted and adequate to lead the blind! To teach the blind is an exercise of guidance unusual and peculiar; and he who can effectually accomplish this must have some important characteristic qualifications.

I. Our Leader's qualifications.

1. *He who leads the blind must have a perfect knowledge of the way.* In this respect a blind man can contribute no help and supply no lack. If his guide be ignorant even of a single step of the way, all his other qualifications are vain.

2. *He must have a faithful regard to the end.* He must display no treachery

the blind are utterly without remedy against any supposable unfaithfulness; their leader must steadfastly keep the end in view, and suffer nothing to turn him aside from the path that conducts to it.

3. *He must pay a constant attention to the path.* He must indulge in no carelessness. When a guide is careless, it is practically as though there were none. God neither slumbers nor sleeps; innumerable as the objects are which demand His notice, He never withdraws His eye for a moment from the steps of those He loves.

4. *He must exercise towards them tender sympathy.* The blind are naturally timid; surrounded with uncertainties, they are apt to be full of fears. Such fears are unreasonable, but it would be cruel to treat them with harshness. Above all guides, God might say, "Now you know you have every reason to trust me; let me see no signs of timidity; step boldly in the way I lead you." He is not angry, however, with the sinking heart and the fearful step (ch. xli. 10, xliii. 2; Ps. ciii. 14; Heb. xiii. 5). Shall we not say cheerfully, "*Thou shalt* guide me with Thy counsel"?

II. THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO ARE LED.

While God leads His people as the blind are led, they ought to walk as the blind who are led; for if the leading of the blind is peculiar, the walking of the blind when led is peculiar too. In the walk of the led blind we may notice—

1. A *practical acceptance of the guidance offered them.* The attitude of God's people should be one of grateful practical acceptance. "Thou shalt guide me; and where Thou leadest I will go."

2. *A spirit of entire submission to his guide.* He feels that it is not for him to ask the question at intervals, "Is this really the right way?" He feels, above all, that it is not for him to be petulant, and to say, "I will not go this way." And such should the attitude of God's people be.

3. *An unrelaxing grasp.* The blind man never for an instant leaves hold of his guide. And not a single step should be taken by God's people without reference to His discretion.

4. *An aspect of cheerful confidence.* A blind man who is feeling his own way walks cautiously and anxiously; but a blind man who is led for the most part walks promptly and cheerfully. He has trusted and is in peace. So should the Christian pursue his way, cheerfully and confidingly (P. D. 2970, 2971).—*J. H. Hinton, M.A.: The Church*, New Series, vol. ix. pp. 1–5.

THE BLIND BEFRIENDED.

xlii. 16. *I will bring the blind, &c.*

I. TO WHOM THE PROMISE IS MADE. Not to every blind man, nor to all sorts of blind people; for there are some blind people whom God does not lead. They are those who are consciously blind, and who confess that once on a time they were totally blind—that what they thought was sight before was all delusion; people that feel their own weakness, their own want of knowledge, their own nothingness; people that are willing to be led; people that cannot see everything, and do not expect to see everything, but are willing to walk by faith in the unseen God, and to trust Jehovah where they cannot trace His footsteps.

II. THE PROMISE THAT IS MADE TO THEM. "*I will bring . . . not known.*"

1. *God Himself will be the Guide of His people when they feel their blindness.* To lead blind men is not an office generally sought; it is not supposed to be attended with any great honour; but it is a very kindly office, and one which any Christian man may be right glad to render to his afflicted friend. But only think of God Himself coming and guiding the blind—leading His blind children! He will not leave you to stumble and grope your way, nor

will He bid you depend upon your fellow-Christian, who is as blind as yourself, but HE will be your Guide. Think of it.

2. Being their Guide, *He will lead them in ways they never went before.* "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not." (α) By the paths of repentance, faith, holiness of life.

3. Although the way by which we go be a way that we know not, *we shall be led safely in it;* for it is not only said, "I will lead them," but "I will bring them," which is more. (β) You may lead a man, but he may be unable to follow you. We shall be safely led, even though we may be sometimes conducted along narrow "paths," and not along the broad and frequented highways.

III. WHAT SHALL COME OF IT? "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

1. If you are in the darkness of trouble, trust in God and the trouble will vanish. The light of His countenance will chase away the darkness. The trouble may remain, but it will no longer distress you.

2. There is a crook in every lot, but trust in God. He can make the most crooked thing that ever did happen suddenly turn out to be the very straightest thing that ever occurred for our welfare.

IV WHAT WILL BE THE END OF IT? The end of it will be (if you can see nothing, if you are blind, and leave yourself to the Lord to lead you, leaving all that concerns you to His counsel and His care), your life will be strewn with mercies, fulfilled promises; "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." You shall find God present with you as long as you live. You will never be able to say, "I rested in Him, and was confounded; I trusted in Him, and found His promise fail." (γ)—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. xxii. pp. 468–480.

(α) The beauty of the promise appears in its especial adaptation to meet the peculiar exigence: "I will bring the blind *by a way that they knew not.*" Of course, when a blind man knows the way, he can almost go without the guide. Many of our friends afflicted with the loss of sight find their way day by day along the accustomed road; and there have been some that have been so expert, though blind, that they could go over fifty miles of country, or thread their way in town up and down the streets of a milkman's walk, serving at each customer's house without ever making a mistake. In fact, they have often acted as guides to others; but then it has always been along a way that they have known.—*Spurgeon.*

(β) The safety follows from the fact that God is the Guide, rather than necessarily from the words of the promise. Alexander translates: "*I will make the blind walk in a way they knew not; in paths they knew not I will make them tread;*" the meaning being, that God would accomplish the deliverance of His people by a mode of His own choosing, to which they would have to conform.—*Spurgeon.*

(γ) Never does a child of God venture everything by faith but the faith answers. . . . I was greatly refreshed yesterday by what may seem to you a very small thing, but it was not small to God. I was turning over our church books and I came to the year 1861, and somewhere in January there is a record, "This church requires £4000 in order to pay for the New Tabernacle, and we, the undersigned, not knowing where it will come from, fully believe in our Heavenly Father that He will send it all to us in the proper time, as witness our hands." And there stood subscribed my hand, and the hands of my deacons, and the hands of my elders, and the hands of a great many Christian women amongst us. Well, I was pleased to see that we had thus put our confidence in God. There were one or two names down there of very prudent brethren, and I recollect at the time I saw them sign it I was rather surprised, because they had been doubting most of the time whether we should ever get the money; but they signed their names like men. A month or two afterwards—say two months—there is this record: "I, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who am less than the least of all saints, set to my seal that God is true, for He has supplied us with all this £4000." And then follows a fresh minute like this: "We, the undersigned, hereby declare our confidence in Almighty God, who has done to us according to our faith, and sent us, even before the time we wanted it, all that was wanted. We are ashamed of ourselves to think that we even had a doubt, and we pray that we may always confide in Him in all things henceforth and for ever." And then there is a long list of signatures. . . . We have had a good many times to do something like that for large amounts, as a church, but has the Lord ever failed us yet? Never! And He never will, and you may depend upon it that in your business, in your household affairs, in your spiritual struggles, if you will trust God, He will be as good as your trust, and better.—*Spurgeon.*

A blind man in a strange city dare not move. How valuable as well as kind if some one take him by the hand! You are compelled to travel in a country with which you are entirely unacquainted. There are many cross roads and few indications of the paths you should take. Some one overtakes you and shows you the path which conducts to your destination, but which, without his leading, you could probably not have found. It is night. Impenetrable darkness surrounds. You dare not move, lest you should plunge into some dangerous place; for it is a wild moorland. But the morning breaks. The sun begins to shine. The light is in your way. There is a crooked road which must be straightened before you can prosper. You cannot straighten it. Lo! it becomes straight!

Is not man's path in this world one of darkness until God illuminates it? We are blind and ignorant. He alone can enlighten and inform us. He alone knows our way, and He has promised to lead us.

I. Look at this truth as illustrated by the history of the Church.

1. In Egypt the Israelites were blind. They groaned under their bondage, but saw no way of deliverance. But God did, and in due time He led them forth.

2. Through the wilderness they were led; they did not foresee the way. Even Moses did not arrange their movements. For great disciplinary reasons God kept them wandering forty years in an unexpected path. But He led them notwithstanding. There was the pillar of cloud and fire by day and by night.

3. In Babylon. It was a dark and dreary time. They hung their harps on the willows. They saw no possibility of restoration. But He knew of the Cyrus whom He would raise up, who would lead the besieging army, who would capture the city, who would proclaim deliverance. He knows beforehand the political movements of heathen courts, and how they will affect His Church.

4. From that time to the birth of Christ. The Jewish people in their own land. Wonderful control of circumstances by which the Advent occurred according to ancient promise.

5. Thus in the Church of Christ to the present time. Early Church led in a way quite other than the Apostles would have chosen. Through many vicissitudes the Christian Church has been brought. Yet her great Head has brought her through. Openings have been made for the gospel in unexpected ways. Thus it will be. We are blind. We know not how the final triumph of Christ will be secured, but it will be secured.

II. Look at this truth as illustrated by the spiritual experience of believers.

God has a people in this world. Some of them may not yet have been called from it. They are in the blindness of heathenism or indifference and sin. God's time comes. Paul sets forth on his missionary journeys, Williams to the South Seas, Moffat to Africa. Souls are brought into contact with the truth. Christian households are formed. Some are called in early life under parental influence; some resist and continue for years in a course of sin; an unexpected sickness or disaster awakens, or God blesses some sermon (H. E. I. 1414, 1415). *You* did not know the way of salvation. Human wisdom did not devise it. You could never have discovered it. He brought it near. He led you to His feet, and began in your soul the strange new life.

And thus He is leading you to heaven. His Word and Spirit conduct by paths hitherto unknown. Sometimes through pleasant fields of promise, of communion, of holy aspiration, of Christian work; sometimes through dark passages of sorrow and perplexity; now awakening the slumbering conscience, now soothing the troubled heart. Thus He will continue (Ps. cvii. 7).

III. Look at this truth as illustrated by the course of Divine Providence.

How often are the Lord's people

brought into complete distress and uncertainty! They dare not move a foot lest it should be a fatal mistake. Then, when He has brought them to the realisation of their entire dependence on Him, and to cast themselves on Him in simple faith, He opens an unexpected way, by means quite unlikely. Jacob thus led into Egypt, where he finds the long-lost Joseph. Peter delivered by the angel from prison. Paul's desire to see Rome gratified, not as he planned, but by his going as a prisoner. You are not to-day where you expected to be at the outset of your career. Recall your changes and deliverances.

Does not this subject teach the lesson of simple trust? Is it dark with you to-day? It is not so with Him. He knows why your sky is overcast. He may have blessings in store which could not otherwise come. Comfort your hearts with His promises. Gather up your courage. Let faith look through the cloud at His guiding hand.—*J. Rawlinson.*

A blind man touches the sympathies of those who see his condition. They become at once ready to help him. To God we are all blind. We see nothing as He sees it; and unless He lead, we cannot go. But His gracious promise is, "I will bring the blind," &c.

I. The fulfilment of this promise has been splendidly exhibited in God's dealings with our general humanity. How remarkable is that mystery of His gracious providence, that the most important things in the universe should come out of their very opposites!—*e.g.*, that the greatest material prosperity should come out of the greatest spiritual aspiration. And yet this has been the history of the world. The only people able to hold itself unpulverised in the conflicts of nations is the one nation set apart wholly to the service of religion. When men try to further the world, enlarge its commerce, increase its mass of material wealth by devoting themselves only to the things which are seen, they become utterly degraded. On the contrary, material things used for spiritual ends gain new splendours. A house consecrated to God becomes a home. Bread eaten rather for the uses of the spirit that is in the body than for the body itself becomes holy.

II. This promise is no less wonderfully fulfilled in God's dealings with individual souls. No man knows the way. Science cannot find a door in the hard wall of the visible: God must reveal it. When a spirit undertakes to engineer its course, it naturally seeks to enter at a wide gate, and to go in the broad way. To all human appearance there is room there. But when God takes the hand of the soul, He carries it through a very narrow gate, and along a very strait way. From His throne He sees every possible way from Egypt to Canaan. The soul can only see its immediate surroundings, a sea in front, mountain walls on both hands, or a wide, pathless, and devouring desert. We do not know the paths. He does. He is offering to guide us. Let us not go blundering in our blindness, falling over a hundred obstacles for every clear step we make. Let us put our hands in His, who hath promised to lead us.

"For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead;
Lead me aright,
Though strength should falter, and though heart should bleed,
Through peace to light.

"I do not ask my cross to understand,
My way to see;
Better in darkness just to feel Thy hand,
And follow Thee."

—*The Study and the Pulpit*, 1877, pp 761, 762.

How rich in comfort we should be if we could get well into the thought of this text, and if we could get the thought well into us! As to our being *blind*, needing counsel and guidance, in constant danger of taking false and disastrous steps if we attempt to pursue our way alone, how often are we reminded of this! 1. *There is the blindness that results from the limitation*

of our faculties. 2. *Blindness that is due to our inexperience.* 3. *Blindness caused by our degradation.*

The promise in our text is very consoling by the very closeness and completeness with which it takes hold of our condition. Not only does it assure us of the loving guidance of God in a general way, but in those cases also where the darkness is deepest, and where the blindness is total. Even the blind have sometimes their familiar paths, where they are safe as long as they keep to them. Here, however, the blind are to be brought by ways they know not: they are to be led in paths they have not known. A very special guidance must here be at work, coming in at the moment of deepest need, taking us by the hand and leading us on, just when even the ordinary knowledge that serves us on the familiar paths can be of no use to us. When the usual roadway ends, when the landmarks disappear, when the well-known signs are gone, and no accustomed object meets the eye, then the Divine Hand comes near to lead the trustful heart, and to direct it into the heavenly way, which otherwise it could not find.

The special thought before us, then, is, that God, in His providence, so orders the critical and decisive steps of His people, that they are safe, even when they cannot see the issues. Illustrate this by a few striking examples. 1. The case of *Joseph.* Trace the stages of his career. Even he does not dream of the *steps* that will lead to the fulfilment of his destiny. Yet in what marvellous ways, through a process which now we should term romantic, does he at last reach the goal! The full conviction of Joseph, that God had been working through all that wonderful history, is clearly stated in his memorable words to his brethren (Gen. xlv. 8). 2. *The sojourn of Israel in Egypt.* Consider the manner in which *Jacob* was drawn down to Egypt to begin that sojourn. Joseph's history had affected, not himself only, but that of the whole family and the whole race of Israel. But how totally unable must the members of that family have been to perceive the critical nature of the successive steps of the history! How wonderful that so many long years after Jacob had given up his son Joseph as being dead, regarding it as the crowning grief of a very strange and sorrowful life, news should be brought him that his son was yet alive, and that he must go and see him before his death! Then consider what that journey from Hebron into Egypt meant. Roots up Jacob from his home in his last days to die in a strange land: inaugurates the life of Israel in Egypt, &c. Yet Jacob, too, could see the hand of God in all the strange history of the past, when he could survey it in its wholeness, and was sure also of the future guidance of the people. Among his dying words he said to Joseph, "Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers." 3. *Israel's deliverance from Egypt.* Strange process was that by which *Moses* was fitted to become their deliverer, &c. Similar illustrations might be easily traced in the lives of such men as David, Nehemiah, Daniel, and indeed most of the saints of Old and New Testament Scripture, all bearing out the truth we have previously stated—that God's providence takes special care of the critical and decisive steps of His people, so that they are safely guided through the paths they did not and could not know.

Our text indicates, also, what these histories beautifully confirm—1. *That happy surprises are in store for those who are thus Divinely led.* "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." 2. *That the Divine purpose and fidelity are all-comprehensive.* God does not break off in the middle of things, but fully completes what He begins. "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Such a subject as this may well be applied to strengthen our faith and hope. It suggests such lessons as the following:—1. *The leading is conducted by Infinite Wisdom and Love.* God's

purpose is one of highest beneficence, and He cannot belie Himself. "He who spared not His own Son," &c. (Rom. viii. 32). 2. The leadings of God may often cross our wishes, and therefore *we must follow in the spirit of trust.* Trust is essential to the blind. To break away from the Guide in the spirit of self-will and rebellion is to invite disaster and endanger all that follows. Our safety lies in our self-surrender to God, in our childlike acceptance of His appointed way. 3. *This trust is to be combined with the spirit of sincere and honest effort.* It is no lazy and spurious resignation, which tamely submits to infirmities it ought to cure, and wearily bears the evils it ought to vanquish. That is not to be led—it is to be carried; and it is a decaying, a rotting religion that will not put its own feet to the ground and bravely do its part. God guides those who will walk, who will follow. Through many a secret passage of life and over many an untrodden path will He at last bring us out into the open places, where He will make darkness light before us, and crooked things straight. These things will He do unto us, and not forsake us.—*William Manning.*

The promises of God are not only "exceeding great and precious," but exceedingly manifold and varied. Now the eye is caught by some single star, shining intensely bright in the midnight sky; and now a clustered constellation seems to burst on the sight. Look, for example, at the text. In it there are four distinct promises, each rising above the other in grace and consolation. They are made by God under the character of a Guide, and they represent Him as undertaking—1. To bring sinners into the right way. 2. To lead them in the way. 3. To remove difficulties out of the way. 4. To continue His guidance even unto the end.—*C. F. Childe: Sermons*, pp. 232, 233.

Led by Unknown Paths.

xlii. 16. *I will lead the blind by a way that they knew not, &c.*

This is the language and promise of the Lord. He here speaks of Himself, and tells us what He will do—things strange and unknown, and perhaps unanticipated. It is impossible to have a just view of this text without adverting with some minuteness to its original application. But its meaning is no less spiritual than prophetical, and is as applicable to every soul as it was to the Gentile nations. This union of prophetical and spiritual meaning forms one of the most striking characteristics, and one of the greatest beauties, of the writings of this prophet. The prophetical meaning has been verified by centuries of history, and all that history now is a bold and open evidence that the spiritual meaning shall equally hold good. If the darkened Gentiles have been led, &c., the darkened sinner, if he will heed God, shall be led so too.

I. Some illustrations of this proposition. When God leads men to true religion, He does lead them very differently from any and from all of their previous anticipations. This is true of every soul in many respects.

1. The thing, circumstance, or truth, whatever it may be, which first fixes the great matter of salvation upon the mind, is something very different from anything commonly anticipated. One man has one set of causes, and another another. So with the young, &c. If they are led to seek God at all, He leads them in a way they knew not. This forms among Christians one of the most common and cherished reasons for gratitude (H. E. I. 1410–1415).

2. The same thing will find illustration in the manner of a sinner's forgiveness. Anxious inquirers are prone to think they must endure some more painful fears, or attain some righteousness which, somehow, shall be an off-

set to their guilt, before God's pardon can ever reach them (Rom. x. 2, 3). All this is in vain. If God leads them, they will see it is in vain. Salvation is a gift; and that God *has* led them in an unknown way, their own astonishment is evidence, when they have found peace in believing. Among the sweet and grateful recollections of believers, this leading of God has universally a place.

3. Perhaps the most remarkable of all illustrations of this truth is to be found in the experience of Christians. We should naturally expect *them* to have more correct expectations of God's treatment than other people. But they are slow to learn; they are often disappointed; their anticipations are no foreshadowings of God's treatment of them. Their comforts, their prosperity, and strength seldom come to them in the way of their anticipations; yea, *very* seldom, or never. The allotments of Divine Providence which affect them most are such as they little expected.

II. SOME REMARKS ON THIS SUBJECT.

1. God will make Himself known as infinitely above us. Be ashamed that you ever distrusted Him.

2. We must have faith. We cannot walk by sight.

3. If God is leading us on toward heaven, He will *compel* us to trust Him. We are blind. By faith darkness becomes light. Never point out a way for yourself. Take God's way. Never despond. Trust *Him*. Accept His Son, and pillow your aching head upon His promises (P. D. 1652–1659).

4. This mode of God's leading us is calculated to bring us most near to Himself. Has it not been so?

Do nothing but trust Him in His Son.—*Ichabod S. Spencer, D.D.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 247–262.

The great truth which the prophet plainly teaches is, that the whole course of each individual is so guided and arranged by an unseen, but not an unfelt hand, that, like a blind man, he is led by another. Prov. xvi. 9 is almost a commentary upon this passage.

> "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."

I. Illustrate this by a little introspective inspection of your inner and past history. Recall, as far as you are able, all you can recollect in your past biography. Is not your whole life, in warp and woof, totally different from anything you ever expected years ago? Like blind men, you have been led in a path that you knew not. This is the fulfilment of God's prophecy. Did not an unforeseen accident, as the world would call it, alter the course of your career? A bereavement—a sudden reverse—an accidental conversation or remark. Will any man tell me that all these little incidents fraught with vast issues were chance? Is it not upon the minutest incidents that the most gigantic results often depend? What can be the explanation? God leads us (H. E. I. 3223–3226, 4015–4022).

But what is still more remarkable, God often takes the sins of His people, and out of those sins He elaborates their progress in likeness to Himself, and in fitness for the kingdom of heaven. Nothing so demonstrates the infinite compassion of God as this.

Apply the same great truths to those things that brought you to the Saviour. The heart wounded to the quick, only to apply to it a balm that heals it perfectly and forever. Instances of this in the Bible: The Samaritan woman (John iv.); the Feast of Pentecost and Peter's sermon (Acts ii.); Saul visiting Damascus on an errand of proscription and blood (Acts ix.); Abraham — Jacob — the Shunamite woman. What are these but proofs that God leads the blind in a way that they know not? And what do they teach us? "Stand still and see the salvation of God." Man's extremity is God's opportunity.

II. Some useful practical inferences.

1. *God is in everything.* In all things magnificently great, and microscopi

cally minute. There is nothing so small that it is beneath His notice; there is nothing so great that He does not control (Matt. x. 30).

2. *This God, that thus leads the blind by a way that they know not, is the Christian's Father.* If it were God only that is in all things, it would not be comfort; it would be awe, &c. Nothing can touch His children till He has given it its mission and its commission.

3. *Do not hastily judge, when adversities overtake you, what the issue will be.* We are prone to infer from what overtakes us now what must betide us always: such is not Christian logic. Whatever be the issue, all afflictions that overtake us have a present beneficent action. Never let us employ in estimating what God has done that unhappy monosyllable IF. These *ifs* are the steps of God—the stages of Providence, &c. (Isa. l. 10). Therefore, whenever you cannot explain the circumstances that surround you, &c., remember that God your Father is leading you, a blind man, by ways that you do not know. Wait, trust, pray, hope, and God will make crooked things straight, and dark places light.—*J. Cumming, D.D.: Redemption Draweth Nigh,* pp. 357–369.

God has foreordained everything which He Himself will do (Acts xv. 18). And He has been gradually unfolding His designs from the beginning. The restoration of the Jews from Babylon and the calling of the Gentiles into the Church were very wonderful events, but in them this prediction was fulfilled. It receives further accomplishment daily.

I. God's dealings are mysterious.

1. The dispensations of His *providence* have been at all times dark.

2. The dispensations of His *grace* are equally inscrutable. This is seen in the first quickening of men from their spiritual death, and in their subsequent spiritual life.

II. His intentions are merciful. The perplexities of His people are often very great, but He has gracious designs in all (Jer. xxix. 11; Job xlii. 12, 13, with James v. 11). *Joseph* (Gen. xxxvii. 6–10, 28; xxxix. 17–20). The same mercy is discoverable in God's dealings with all His afflicted people. He suffers their path to be for a time dark and intricate, but He invisibly directs and manages their concerns; He gradually removes their difficulties, and clears up their doubts (Gal. iii. 23, 24; John xv. 2; Mal. iii. 3; Ps. xcvii. 2). They are often ready to doubt His love, but—

III. His regards are permanent. God did not forget His people when they were in Babylon, neither will He now forsake those who trust in Him (Isa. xliv. 7, 8, xlix. 14–16; 1 Sam. xii. 22; Phil. i. 6). The prophets declare this in the strongest terms (Isa. liv. 9, 10; Jer. xxxi. 37 and xxxii. 40). St. Paul abundantly confirms their testimony (Rom. xi. 29; Heb. xiii. 5, 6).

INFERENCES.—1. How careful should we be not to pass a hasty judgment on the Lord's dealings! (H. E. I. 4038–4048). 2. How safely may we commit ourselves to God's disposal!—*C. Simeon, M.A.: Claude's Essay, &c.*, p. 229.

A PROMISE FOR THE PERPLEXED.

xlii. 16. *I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.*

This promise refers primarily to the manner in which God purposed to deliver His ancient people from bondage, by means at once unprecedented and complete; but it is surely available for all who, confessing their own blindness and powerlessness, cast themselves upon God for guidance and succour. Such persons may plead this promise in reference—1. **To ignorance which they wish to have removed** (James i. 5). 2. **To mysterious providences.** God's dealings with us and others are often incomprehensible, and inexpli-

cable by us; but let us wait patiently, believingly, and prayerfully, and in due time this promise will be fulfilled (H. E. I. 4040–4058). 3. **To Christian duty.** The sincere Christian constantly asks, "What is the will of God concerning me?" But many difficulties may be in the way of deciding this question; a variety of points may require to be nicely adjusted; contrary claims may leave the balance of the scales almost in a state of equipoise; but in due season the sincere seeker for Divine direction shall be directed (Prov. iii. 6). 4. **To formidable difficulties** that appear insurmountable. "There is a crook in every lot;" but in regard to the Christian all "crooked things shall be made straight." They may give a great deal of trouble for a time, but in the end they will prove helpful and not hurtful to the patient believer.—*William Reeve: Miscellaneous Discourses*, pp. 434–440.

Sin has its fascinating lustre and flaring splendour; murky clouds often rest upon the way of righteousness and truth; but sin's splendours go out in pitch darkness, while at eventide there is light for the Christian.

I. The believer's darkness is turned into light, and the crooks of his lot are straightened.

1. *The frequent grim darkness.* (1.) Much of it is of his own imagining. Many of our sorrows are purely home-spun, and some minds are specially fertile in self-torture; they have the creative faculty for the melancholy; enjoyments even cause them to tremble lest they should be shortlived. (2.) Much existing darkness is exaggerated. "Joseph is not, Simeon is not;" but Jacob pictured Joseph devoured of an evil beast, and Simeon given up to slavery in a foreign land. Take up the cross, and mountains will shrink to molehills. (3.) Troubles disappear just when we expect them to become overwhelming. The waters of the Red Sea stood upright as a heap to make a pathway for God's people. Who can tell what plan God may have in store for him? Hezekiah was sore dismayed before Rabshakeh. Little did he know that the talk and boasting were all that would come of it. (4.) When the trial comes, God has a way of making His people's trials cease just as they reach their culminating point. As the sea when it reaches to the flood pauses awhile and then returns to the ebb, so our sorrows rise to a height and then recede. Hear God bid Abraham sacrifice his son! He makes darkness light when the darkest hour of the night has struck. (5.) Every trial was foreseen, and *has been forestalled.* God can furnish a table in the wilderness. (6.) However severe the trial, God has promised that *as our days our strength shall be.* Considering that the grace is always proportioned to the trial, and that trials produce manliness, one might even choose trial for the sake of obtaining the grace which is promised with it; the mingled trial and grace will make our lives sublime. (7.) Especially *dwell upon the promise that the Lord will make your darkness light.* How soon, and how perfectly, can Omnipotence accomplish this! How soon is it done in the physical universe! A fulness of consolation can be poured forth in a moment. How is it done? Sometimes by *the sun of His providence.* Often by *the moon of Christian experience*, which shines with borrowed light, but yet with sweet and tranquil brightness. Frequently by *a sight of Jesus going before*, and by hearing Him say, "Follow me; fear not; for in all your afflictions I am afflicted." God had one Son without sin; but He never had a son without chastisement. And often by snatching a firebrand from the altar of His Word, and waving it as a torch before us, that we may advance in its light.

2. *The crooks of the believer's lot.* (1.) One may lie in your poverty. (2.) Another in some very crooked calamity. (3.) If he is free from these, he has at least a crooked self. The others would matter little but for this. It may be you have crooked

temptations—temptations to profanity or to certain vices.

3. *God will make all the crooked things straight.* (1.) It may be that some are straight now; the making straight is only to make them seem so to us. Our crosses are our best estates. (2.) God can bend the crooked straight, and what will not bend, He can break. The crooked character has been bent straight; the judgment of God has taken away the crook out of the household, so that the righteous might have peace. If He do not this, He will give power to overleap the difficulty (2 Sam. xxii. 30).

II. Some words to the seeker.

1. Some doctrines are dark to you. God makes all light to faith.

2. Perhaps your darkness rises from deep depression of mind. Faith must *precede* its dispersion; faith will disperse it.

3. Your crooked natural disposition God can make straight. Note—(1.) *That which saves is not what is, but what will be.* "I will make darkness light; I will make crooked things straight." There is a transformation in store. (2.) *It is not what you can do, but what God can do.* "*I*, Jehovah, will do it." (3.) This work may not be yours *at once, but it shall be soon.* It does not say, "I will make darkness light today;" still it does say, "I will."

III. Two lessons to believers.

1. If God will thus make all your darkness light and all your crooked things straight, *do not forestall your troubles.* 2. *Always believe in the power of prayer.*—*C. H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (1868), pp. 709–720.

Blind in the Sunlight.

xlii. 18–20. *Hear, ye deaf, and look, ye blind, &c.*

Thus the Lord expostulates with His ancient people, and thus He has reason to expostulate with us. We succeed them, both in religious privileges and in the abuse of those privileges. Where does the light of the Gospel shine more clearly? But do we excel other people in knowledge and virtue, in faith and patience, in temperance and goodness, as we surpass them in the means of acquiring these Christian graces? No! There is here no one who could challenge the justice and propriety of this expostulation, if it were addressed to him. In our text we have—

I. A DESCRIPTION.

"Deaf," "blind," &c. We are "deaf," in a spiritual sense, when we do not attend to the Divine admonitions, or give earnest heed to the word of instruction; "blind," when we do not perceive the glory of the Gospel, and the force and beauty of Divine truth. This description is—

1. *Absolutely true of most men.* The ignorance of numbers who constantly enjoy the best religious instruction is far beyond what any person can imagine who has not made it a matter of special investigation. Nothing they have ever heard or seen during their attendance upon the ordinance of religion has made any effectual impression upon them. The first principles of Christianity are unknown to them. They have never learned to understand what is meant by repentance, faith, holiness, the Divine character or their own, the evil of sin, the extent of their own sinfulness, or even what is required of them in the common duties of life. Yet some of them delude themselves with the hope that there is before them a future of eternal blessedness! They are not all equally ignorant. Some of them amidst the light of the Gospel and the sound of religious instruction occasionally receive a little. But the whole truth they will not receive. Many doctrines and precepts of Christianity oppose their passions and prejudices, and therefore against these they obstinately close their ears and shut their eyes.

2. *In some measure true of all men.* The sincerest followers of Christ may

be charged with not exercising, as they ought, the spiritual senses which God has given them. The best Christians would have been better still, if they had never, by their slothfulness and inattention, lost the benefits conveyed by the means they have been favoured with (H. E. I. 2570–2584, 2654–2658).

As far as this description is true of us our condition is a terrible one. 1. *It is the result of sin.* Is it not a terrible sin even to be heedless of the messages sent us by Almighty God? But many have deliberately shut out the rays of the Sun of righteousness, because light was troublesome, and would not permit them to enjoy those works of darkness on which they were bent. 2. *While it continues, all the means intended to deliver us from sin will fail to benefit us.* As the most improving advice given in conversation is useless to a deaf person, and the most delightful objects are displayed to no purpose before the blind, so the word of truth is preached in vain to those who have neither ears to hear nor eyes to see its meaning and excellency. Before one step in the way of salvation can be taken, this hindrance must be removed. 3. *Our condition is nearly hopeless, and tends to become absolutely hopeless.* (α) 4. *We ought to be ashamed of it.* You ought to be ashamed of your ignorance of Christianity in a Christian country, and still more ashamed and humbled for the cause of it, which is always sloth, stubbornness, or self-conceit. 5. *We ought to be alarmed on account of it.* For the reason already given—that our condition tends to become a hopeless one. And also because the penalty of wilful blindness in the midst of sunlight is consignment to eternal darkness and woe.

II. AN ADMONITION.

There is a call to the deaf to hear, nd to the blind to look that they may see. This is like the command of our Saviour to the man with the withered hand to stretch it forth, and implies that this deafness and blindness was their fault as well as their misfortune. Every command of God is accompanied with grace and strength. He requires nothing of His people but what He has promised to enable them to perform. In dependence upon His promise, they ought therefore to stir themselves up to the discharge of their duty. The spiritually deaf should endeavour to open their ears to instruction, the spiritually blind to open their eyes to that wondrous display of grace which the Gospel exhibits. The effort will be as successful as that of the man to stretch out his withered hand, when it is made in obedience to the Divine command, and in dependence on the Divine blessing. (β) And when this fatal obstruction is removed, and we have got ears to hear and eyes to see, the means of grace and salvation will have their proper influence.—*William Richardson: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 470–482.

(α) When the habit of inattention is formed, or men's minds are so armed by prejudice as to be determined not to hear or embrace certain truths which are offensive, their condition is nearly hopeless. He who does not use his spiritual senses, and keep them in constant exercise, must expect to find them impaired, and, in time, lost. Those congregations which have long enjoyed a sound and animated course of instruction without any particular benefit, become in the end more stupid and hardened than those which have not been so favoured. What can be said or done to do them good, which has not been repeatedly tried in vain? As time and increasing years have a happy effect in strengthening and confirming good habits, so they have a still more powerful influence in confirming bad ones. So that those persons who suffer their passions and prejudices, their disrelish for the word of truth, their blindness and inattention, and all their other inveterate habits to accompany them till the decline of life, are likely to lie down with them in their graves, and to be found encumbered with them on the morning of the resurrection.—*Richardson.*

(β) See Dr. Bushnell's admirable sermon, "Duty not Measured by Ability," in *The New Life*, pp. 253–266.

CHRIST A LAW-MAGNIFYING SAVIOUR.

xlii. 18–21. *Hear, ye deaf, and look, ye blind, &c.*

I. THE NAME HERE GIVEN TO SINNERS (ver. 18). Equally applicable to all unconverted men. 1. Naturally *deaf*. Do not hear the voice of Providence, of Christ, of pastors (Ps. lviii. 4). 2. *Blind*. This word is constantly used in the Bible to describe the stupidity of unconverted souls (Matt. xv. 14, xxiii. 26, 17; Rev. iii. 17). They do not see the depravity, &c., of their own soul, the beauty, &c., of the glorious "Sun of Righteousness," the path they pursue, leading to hell. "*Hear*, ye deaf; and *look*, ye blind." Those who are deaf and blind are generally the least attentive. *Attend*, for God calls upon you! But you say this is a contradiction, "If I am deaf, how can I hear? If I am blind, how can I look?" Leave God to settle that difficulty, only listen and look up. There is truly no difficulty about it.

II. THE OBJECT POINTED TO. "Who is blind," &c. Every expression here evidently points to Christ. (a)

1. My servant (ver 1, cf. ch. lii. 13, liii. 2; Luke xxii. 27; Phil. ii. 7). He came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him.

2. My Messenger (Job xxxiii. 23; Mal. iii. 1). God sent Him.

3. He that is perfect. "He did no sin," &c.

4. Blind and deaf (also verse 20). This describes the way in which He went through His work in the world (same as verse 2; and Ps. xxxviii. 13, 14; Isa. liii. 7). He was blind to His own sufferings. He was deaf: He seemed not to hear their plotting against Him, nor their accusations, for He answered not a word (Matt. xxxii. 13, 14).

III. THE WORK OF CHRIST (verse 21). This is in some respects the most wonderful description of the work of Christ given in the Bible. He is often said to have fulfilled the law (Matt. iii. 15, v. 17). But here it is said, He will "magnify the law," &c. He came to give new lustre and glory to the holy law of God, that all worlds might see and understand that the law is holy, &c. He did this—

1. *By His sufferings.* He magnified the holiness and justice of the law by bearing its curse. He took upon Him the curse due to sinners, and bore it in His body on the tree, and thereby proved that God's law cannot be mocked. Learn—(1.) The certainty of hell for the Christless. (2.) To flee from sin.

2. *By His obedience.* He added lustre to the goodness of the law by obeying it. Learn the true wisdom of those who love God's holy law (Ps. xix.)

IV. THE EFFECT. "God is well pleased." 1. With Christ. 2. With all that are in Christ.

CONCLUSION.—He that wrought out this righteousness invites you to get the benefit of it.—*R. M. M'Cheyne: Sermons and Lectures*, pp. 349–355.

(a) This by no means certain. The preacher will remember that concerning this passage diametrically opposite views are held by different commentators. The remarks of Birks and Cheyne are here given as specimens.

Birks:—"*Vers.* 18–21. These words are commonly applied to the Jewish people. Of recent critics, Dr. Henderson, almost alone, refers them to the Messiah. But his exposition of them as ironical, or the language of the Jews, is open to very weighty objection. On the usual view, the title 'the Servant of God,' would be used twice emphatically, and in close connection, in two different senses. The objection is only strengthened by the fruitless attempt to join Messiah and the nation together, in both places, as the common subject. The title 'perfect' (β) cannot be applied, without great violence, to those whose sin is denounced in the same context, and belongs naturally to our Lord alone.

"The guilt and shame of the people are here enforced by direct contrast with the true Israel, the Prince who has power with God. Blind and deaf in spirit, not in their outward senses, they are to fix their eyes on Him, that sight and hearing may be restored. Theirs was the blindness and deafness of idolatry and self-righteous pride. He, too, is blind and deaf, but in a sense wholly opposite, by unspeakable forbearance and grace. So Ps. xxxviii. 13: 'I as a deaf man heard not, and I was as one dumb that openeth not his

mouth.' The Gospels renew the same picture (John viii. 6–11). It is the same with the divine perfection in Balaam's message: 'He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel.' The person named is the Messenger whom the Lord was about to send (John x. 36). He is the Perfect One, alone pure and sinless; the Lord's servant, whose gentleness and patience have been described before, and who is to set judgment in the earth. On this view the repeated question, Who is blind as He? has a deep significance. Where sin has abounded grace still more abounds. The marvel of Israel's blind idolatry and unbelief is to be surpassed by a greater marvel of love and grace in Israel's Redeemer, who sees as though He saw not, and hears as though He heard not, when He visits His people in great mercy to pity and to save.

"*Ver.* 20. The blindness of this Servant of the Lord is now explained, with allusion to the promise (xxxv. 5): 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.' It is the free choice of patient love. He can open the ears of the deaf, but refuses to hear the sounds of strife and violence. Every sense is awake for mercy. He gives voice, hearing, sight, to the dumb, the deaf, and the blind, but deaf and dumb Himself in refusing to judge when He comes to save. Thus men are blessed, God is glorified, and the excellence of God's righteous law of perfect love is for ever revealed."—*Commentary*, pp. 218, 219.

Cheyne:—"*Vers.* 18–20. We are confronted here with an at first sight perplexing discrepancy, viz., that whereas in vers. 1–7 'the Servant' is introduced as an indefatigable worker in Jehovah's cause, and as especially appointed 'to open blind eyes,' in ver. 19 we find 'My Servant' and 'My Messenger' described as spiritually 'blind' and 'deaf.' This, however, is one of those apparent inconsistencies in which Eastern poets and teachers delight, and which are intended to set us on the search for a higher and reconciling idea. The higher idea in the case before us is that the place of the incompetent messenger shall be taken by One both able and willing to supply his deficiencies and to correct his faults.' Israel—the people being as yet inadequate to his sublime destiny—Jehovah's own 'elect,' shall come to transform and elevate the 'unprofitable servant.'

"*Ver.* 18. *Hear, ye deaf . . .*] Jehovah is the speaker. He has before Him a company of spiritually deaf and blind. Surely (we may suppose Him to make this reflection) they are not all stone-deaf; some may be able by exerting the power yet graciously continued to them to hear God speaking in history and in prophecy (comp. ver. 23)!—Thus it would almost seem as if Jehovah Himself had assumed the function of 'opening blind eyes,' previously ascribed to the Servant. But there is no real discrepancy. The operations of Jehovah and of His Servant are all one; Jehovah must nominally interpose here in order that the incompetence of His people-Servant may be exposed, and the necessity for another Servant, springing out of but far worthier than Israel, be made clear.

"*Ver.* 19. *Who is blind but my Servant?*] The blind and deaf Servant means the people of Israel, regarded as a whole, in its present state of spiritual insensibility. Jehovah is sometimes described anthropomorphically as 'saying,' or, more fully, as saying to His heart, *i.e.* to Himself (Gen. viii. 21). It is such a 'saying' that we have here. Jehovah sadly reflects, 'Who among earth's inhabitants is so blind and deaf as Israel, my servant?' Strange fact! The servant, who needs a sharp eye to catch the least gesture of his master (Ps. cxxiii. 2)—the messenger, who requires an open ear to receive his commissions, is deaf! To interpret 'Who is blind, &c.' of Jesus Christ, as if 'the guilt and shame of the people [were] here enforced by direct contrast with the true Israel, the Prince who has power with God,' and as if the true, no less than the phenomenal Israel, could be called blind and deaf with reference to His slowness to take offence (Prof. Birks), is to go directly counter to Biblical usage (see vi. 10; Jer. v. 21; Ezek. xii. 2; Zech. vii. 11). In fact, the only passages quoted in support of this far-fetched view are Pa. xxxviii. 13, where the *sin-conscious* Psalmist resigns his defence to God; and John viii. 6–11, where the Saviour (if this interpolated narrator may be followed), under exceptional circumstances, refuses an answer to His persecutors."—*Commentary*, vol. i. pp. 259, 260.

(*β*) Compare other translations of this verse. *Cheyne*: "Who is blind but my servant? and deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as the surrendered one? and blind as the servant of Jehovah?" *Arnold*: "Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I would send? Who is blind as God's liegeman, and blind as the LORD's servant?"—See also the translations by *Alexander* and *Delitzsch*.

THE LAW MAGNIFIED BY THE REDEEMER.

xlii. 21. *The Lord is well pleased, &c.*

God may be said to make the law honourable by everything by which He shows His own great respect to it. In every government, the sovereign is the fountain of honour: in the Divine government, God is the fountain of all honour. Whatever shows God's respect to it, magnifies the law. The law is

magnified when either the precepts or penalty of it are fulfilled, when the commands or threatenings of it are satisfied. The work of redemption magnifies God's law :—

I. By the perfect obedience that Christ gave to the commandments of it. What is meant by His obedience to it? In ourselves, holiness and obedience to the law are but one and the same thing; but it is not so, it was not so always, as to Christ. Before He came to the world He was perfectly holy; but that holiness could not be called obedience. It was when Christ took on Him our nature that He fulfilled our law. It was our duty that He performed, and our righteousness that He fulfilled, as well as our sins that He bore.

How much this obedience magnified God's law as to the commands of it, will appear when we consider the following properties of it :—1. It was perfect obedience. "He continued in all things written in the book of the law to do them." 2. It was the obedience of the most glorious person that could be subject to the law. 3. It was obedience performed by express Divine appointment. 4. It was obedience performed in a low condition; which served to show, that obedience to the law in any rank or station is honourable. 5. It was an obedience of universal influence as to the example of it.

II. By the perfect satisfaction He gave to the threatenings of it. He bore the penalty of it, by His sufferings and death. Three things show the importance of keeping up the authority of the law :—the Author of the law, the matter and end of it, and the kingdom that is commanded by it. Notice the properties of Christ's suffering the penalty of the law. 1. It was a real execution of the law. The law was given by Moses, but fulfilled only by Christ. 2. It is a total execution of the law. No other punishment of creatures shall be called such. It is of Him only that it can be said that "he made an end of sin," of the punishment of it. 3. It was an execution of it upon the most honourable person that could suffer. All the other persons that ever suffered for sin on earth or hell, principalities and powers of darkness, were but mean, low, vulgar, in comparison of this King of kings and Lord of lords. 4. It was also an execution of it upon the nearest relation of the Judge. The relation between God and Christ is expressed in the analogy between a father and a son. But the relation between a father and a son is nothing to that between God and Christ. This serves to show the righteousness of the law. If a judge executed the law only upon his enemies, he might be called partial; but if he executed the law upon those he cannot be said to have any hatred to, that shows him to be actuated by the purest justice and righteousness (H. E. I. 374–383).

III. The work of Redemption magnifies the law, as it is a work of infinite love. Everything that hath the nature of a motive to strengthen obedience magnifies the law. Favours, as well threatenings, are motives to excite to obey God's law; and this is the greatest favour, and is one of the chief motives to stir up to obedience and restrain from evil. Threatenings are not the only motives to stir up to obedience. Gifts from the lawgiver are also motives to obey the law.

What can be more fit to magnify a law of love than a work of infinite love? If we considered this, we would see nothing a greater motive to establish the law. The law of God commands us to love God, and the work of redemption is the greatest motive to love Him. The law of God commands us to glorify Him: the work of redemption shows us the brightest manifestation of His glory

IV. The work of redemption magnifies the law by the reward of obedience. The law is honoured, not only when obedience is performed, but when obedience is rewarded. Every person thinks himself honoured when he is obeyed, but doubly honoured when obedience to him is rewarded. The honour that was done to Christ is done to the law; and not only all the

honour that was done to Jesus Christ, but all the gifts that His people get by being united to Him for the sake of His merits, that is, for the sake of His obedience to the law. This, indeed, may make us admire the wisdom of God, that the honour that is done to the criminal is done to the law; for the sinner that believes in Christ is made righteous through His righteousness, and the law is always honoured by the blessedness of the righteous.

V. The application of the work of Redemption through the Spirit magnifies the law. The law is magnified by everything that puts disgrace upon sin. That which puts disgrace upon sin puts honour upon obedience. We are justified by faith in Christ's righteousness; and by the Spirit we are enabled to render obedience.

IMPROVEMENTS:—

1. Every one who despises the law despises Christ. 2. God, having magnified His law so wondrously, will have us always stand in awe of it. 3. We should take encouragement to ourselves, if we truly repent of our sins, if we truly see our need of Christ, to hope for mercy, because justice is so gloriously satisfied. 4. We should be adoring the wonderful, immense wisdom of God in the work of redemption, the manifold wisdom of God, the many attributes manifested in it. —*John Maclaurin*: "*Select Works*," pp. 242–271.

Among all the obscurities about the prophetical writings, the simple fact that there is a mysterious prophetic personage is plain and obvious. He is introduced in the beginning of this chapter in a very solemn and impressive manner. Who this is, it may sometimes be found difficult to determine. Jesus is the key to the interpretation. That *this* chapter belongs to Christ, would seem to admit of very easy proof: just by the Bible interpreting itself (Matt. xii. 17–21; Mark i. 11, and ix. 7). This passage is spoken of Christ.

I. *A preliminary observation or two.* 1. With respect to the "law." It is a word used in Scripture in two ways. (1) As a *universal* thing—the moral law. (2) As a *limited* thing—the ceremonial institutions, given to a particular part of mankind, and for a particular time. 2. To "magnify the law and make it honourable" cannot mean that Messiah was to produce any change in it—that what He did was to perfect the law itself; as if the law had any defect about it. The *moral* law, necessarily resulting from the Divine perfections and government, is incapable of improvement. Christ did not do anything in the way of enlarging the *ceremonial* law. 3. We cannot suppose that this means, that there was to be any change effected in the conceptions of God about the law—that the work of Christ was intended to affect the Divine mind in relation to it. 4. It must signify the manner in which created minds were to be affected by it. Something was to be done, by which there should be a certain impression with respect to law, produced upon the minds of the intelligent universe—that should, so to speak, give body and substance and visibility to God's own conceptions about His law.

II. *The necessity for this.* If sin had never entered into the universe, God's law would always have been a sublime and grand thing in the estimation of that universe. And if when sin was permitted to enter the universe, the penalties and sanctities of the law had been carried out fully and literally, then law would always have been magnified; it would then have been always a great and glorious thing. But if there is to be the fact, that there are sinners and violators of law, those that on just principle are exposed to the penalty, and yet they are to escape, and to be treated as if they were actually righteous, &c., then law so far seems to go for nothing,—there is danger of a certain effect being produced upon the minds of God's creatures, injurious to His character, and government, and law. And, therefore, there

was a necessity in the nature of things, that this escape from penalty and punishment should not only be agreeable to the principles of law, but that there should be a manifestation of that: that something shall be done, the moral effect of which upon the minds of God's rational creatures shall be equivalent to the impression which would have been produced by the literal carrying out of the principles of law itself. The work of Christ does this, and this prophetic declaration is realised.

III. *The manner and way in which this thing, thus necessary, was done.*

1. Christ's teaching always maintained the authority of the law (Matt. v. 17).

2. His personal character magnified and honoured it. He was "made under law," and obeyed it, and never wished to be free from it (Heb. vii. 26).

3. But these are but preparatory to that one great act which was the consummation of His work—His propitiatory sacrifice; in which, in a certain sense, He stood forth, as it were, bearing the penalty of the moral law, and in another sense manifesting the substance and casting a light and glory upon the ceremonial. (Heb. ii. 14–17.) There was a substitution in two senses: (1) of person—(2) of suffering—producing an impression upon all moral nature of God's regard to His own authority, and His determination always to act in harmony with law.

4. His people are redeemed unto obedience (Titus ii. 14; Rom. viii. 3.) Hence, saints love the law—respect it—rejoice in it.

The substitutionary work of Christ expounds those many representations of Scripture, harmonising with the text. The private and personal affections of our nature are not enough as an analogy to the work of God. The case of the king of Babylon and Daniel will illustrate the whole of this subject (Daniel vi. See also, H. E. I. 376, 383, 391).—*Thomas Binney: The Pulpit*, vol. 40, pp. 234–240.

THE HONOUR WHICH THE GRACE OF THE GOSPEL REFLECTS UPON THE HOLINESS AND AUTHORITY OF THE LAW.

I. It is necessary to have clear views of the characteristics and operations of the two dispensations.

1. The Law of God is simply the revealed will of the Creator. First proclaimed when the first intelligent creature was formed, and it requires from all moral beings unqualified and instant submission. This Law made known to man at his creation, revealed anew at Sinai, renewed and confirmed by Christ. No intelligent creature exempt from it. Disobedience involves condemnation and ruin, arrays God against transgressors. Thus it was with angels who sinned, with Adam, and is with man now. The holiness, faithfulness, authority of this law can never be annulled. It is the law of God, not of Moses.

2. The Gospel is a free offer of actual and finished salvation to man, who is under condemnation of law. It is a remedy for existing, actual evil; restores the transgressor of the Law, not by annulling, but by fulfilling the Law for him; announces a Saviour who has assumed the sinner's place, and rendered for him the satisfaction and obedience required by Law.

The same Divine Being who gave the Law also gave the Gospel. No inconsistency or change in Him.

II. Consider the direct assertion of the text—that the righteousness of Christ magnifies the Law and makes it honourable. Gospel teaching does not set aside the Law or subvert moral obligations. In preaching justification through grace, we establish, confirm, and honour the Law. For we announce a salvation provided by God, in which He is well pleased; which satisfies every legal demand; makes the sinner secure; and infinitely glorifies the Divine character.

1. The Gospel honours and magnifies the Law by the *voluntary obedience* of Jesus. The Law is honoured by the obedience of angels, would have been honoured by man's obedience:

but the submission and obedience of Christ magnifies it even more highly.

2. By the *voluntary sufferings* of Jesus. If all the transgressors of the Law had been punished, the Law would have been honoured. It was more honoured when God Himself consented to bear its penalties. Christ's sufferings the same *in nature* as those which unpardoned sinners endure. Those sufferings were a perfect satisfaction to the violated Law (H. E. I. 377–383).

3. By requiring every sinner, as a condition of pardon, *to acknowledge his guilt in breaking the Law, and his desert of condemnation under its sentence.*

4. In the *new obedience* rendered by those whose hearts have been renewed.

These the truths which the apostles preached, for which the Reformers died, without which the Gospel cannot triumph over error and sin.—*Stephen H. Tyng, D.D.: The Law and the Gospel*, pp. 374–390.

Sin a Spoiler.

xlii. 22. *But this is a people robbed and spoiled.*

When the unsuspecting traveller is waylaid, overcome by superior force and plundered; when a house is broken into and all its valuables carried off; when a country is overrun by hostile armies, devastated and pillaged, we cry out against such outrages, and pity the poor victims. Shall we be moved by wrongs like these, and yet be indifferent to the far more fearful robbery and spoliation which we have suffered through sin? Shall we continue to harbour and encourage the spoiler, who is snatching from us our most valuable possessions, nay, is even making a prey of ourselves? It is sad to contemplate the havoc which sin has made upon our nature. But it is necessary to have a right estimate of the extent to which we have suffered. Deep convictions of the reality, nature, and consequences of sin are essential to a proper appreciation of the blessings of the gospel.

We are not left in doubt as to the cause of Israel's degradation. The question is put and answered in verse 24. There is the explanation of the misery and ruin in which the people were involved. It would have been a small matter had the invaders only spoiled them of their possessions, but they themselves became a prey. The condition to which they were reduced is a good example and representation of the consequences of sin. Let us contemplate the ravages of this spoiler in the light of the words before us:—

I. **Sin robs us of peace.** It is a truth which we cannot evade, that as soon as a man commits a sinful act he has introduced into his life an element of unrest and misery. He has broken down the walls which protected him on every side, and now the forces of evil assail him unopposed. In this respect every sin bears a resemblance to the first sin. The guilty pair in Eden sought concealment among the trees, but it was an unavailing refuge. God brought them forth for conviction and sentence. There is no peace to the wicked. He has leagued against himself penal forces which cannot be resisted. What is here said of Israel is true of him, "they are snared in holes." In the false refuges to which the guilt-stricken soul betakes itself, it is "snared and taken." Sin most surely finds out the sinner. He becomes a prey to the wicked deeds which he has committed. We have heard of man-traps and spring-guns being fixed with wires in such a manner that when a wire was trod upon, a gun wheeled round, and shot or wounded the intruder. Such are the dangers which beset the sinner as he pursues his lawless course. How can there be any peace or security in such a case? The moment we sin, God delivers us over to

the spoilers, who track our steps, and give us no peace (H. E. I. 4603–4612).

II. Sin robs us of liberty. Under the plausible pretext of giving us liberty, it takes it from us. (2 Pet. ii. 19.) Men think that by indulging evil desires they widen the bounds of their freedom, but soon they find themselves degraded slaves (H. E. I. 4482–4484). They think it a fine thing to to be allowed to do as they like, but ere long they become the captives of their sinful likings. We all know the enchaining power of habit. Sin is a hardening thing, but it is also cunning, deceitful, insidious (Heb. iii. 13). "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird," but foolish man rushes into the net. He harbours the thief who will plunder him of his choicest treasures, and deprives him of his liberty. He dallies with the deceiver, till he is fast in its clutches. Priding himself on his freedom, he finds it only a freedom to do evil, a freedom from law, while he has lost the power of doing good. Milton speak of those

> "Who bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
> And still revolt when truth would set them free:
> License they mean when they cry Liberty!"

III. Sin robs us of moral power and influence. Righteousness is bold, fearless, strong; but disobedience is weak and cowardly. A holy and upright life is an influence for good. The man who walks with God, who is much with Him in secret communion, reflects the heavenly rays that fall upon his own soul, and becomes a light and a guide to others. But once admit sin into the heart, and his moral power is so far lost. He no longer looks with reproving eye on the sins of other men, for he has allowed the spoiler to enter his own heart and to sap his spiritual strength. Take Samson as an example. Revealing to his temptress the secret of his strength, and suffering his locks to be shorn, he thought he might go forth as at other times and shake himself free of his assailants; but he wist not that the Lord was departed from him. He is a type of thousands who have been spoiled through sinful indulgence of their moral power. This result is brought about in a gradual, imperceptible way, just as a disease may for long have its seat in the system before it reveals itself outwardly; but meanwhile the man's strength is declining. The sin you indulge may be unknown to the world, but there will be a something in your life and demeanour which will betray a hidden weakness, a waning power, a flagging zeal (H. E. I. 4491–4495).

IV. Sin robs us of sensibility. A long course of wickedness deadens the moral sense, makes men think lightly of sin, and even disregard the divine threatenings and judgments (ver. 31). What spiritual blindness sin has wrought! what gross insensibility! The fire closes round him, yet he cares not. God contends with him, but conscience is so seared and deadened that nothing can rouse it. See, then, what sin can do. It can so rob and spoil us as to leave us destitute of any feeling to which either God's love or wrath can appeal.

These are some of the treasures of which sin robs us. It opens so many doors by which spoilers enter. The theft may be perpetrated in a stealthy, secret way, so that for a time the sinner is not aware of his loss, nay, may be deluded with the notion that he is a gainer, and not a loser; but soon the deception is discovered when he finds that for a few glittering toys he has bartered away his choicest endowments, that the prowlers whom he never suspected have made off with his most precious treasures. Our subject presents a true picture of man's state; but a man may be robbed and not be aware of it. Some precious article may be surreptitiously taken from his house, and not be missed for a long time. So it is with the unawakened sinner. He knows not that he has been harbouring thieves who have carried off his substance and robbed him of his spiritual possessions. If he set any value on these

things, he would soon see his destitution; but, pleased with trifles, he knows not his loss (Rev. iii. 17).

Our first need, then, is to be convinced that we have been robbed and spoiled. Reflect, O sinner, on the state to which Satan has reduced you, the prey which sin has made of you. Look up to God—no peace, no communion, but a sentence ready at any moment to be carried into execution. Look into your own heart, where corruption is weaving its cords around you.

But can the stolen goods be recovered? So far as human help goes we are helpless; "none saith, Restore." But there is One who can arrest the spoiler and bring back the lost treasures. If stung by the nettle, you have not far to look for the leaf that eases the pain (ver. 21). Christ has said, "Restore: stop thief," and invites us to the enjoyment of the dignity and riches we have forfeited (Rom. v. 1; Col. i. 20; Rom. iii. 22–26; John viii. 32; Gal. v. 1; Zech. xii. 10).—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

The Subjection of the Jews an Admonition to the World.

xlii. 23–25. *Who among you will give ear to this? &c.*

I. *The desolation brought upon the Jews.* Terrible. Sent upon them by God. Defeated after their rejection of the Messiah. It continues to this day.

II. *The justice of the sentence that is gone forth against them.*

III. *Their insensibility under these judgments.* They do not see the sentence which, in evil hour, their own ancestors pronounced against them: "His blood be on us and on our children!"—and on them it hath been. This is the awful curse under which they are now drooping and groaning (H. E. I., 143).

IV. *An appeal arising out of this awful dispensation as applicable to ourselves.* The whole history of the Jews is intended to be an admonition to us. Sharing in their sins, we shall certainly share in their chastisements.—*R. C. Dillon, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 72–103.

Deadened by Sin.

xlii. 25. *And it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart.*

One of the most evil results of sin is, that it hardens and deadens the soul. When persisted in it goes beyond the stage of arousing anxiety and alarm; it stupefies and benumbs, so that a man gets "past feeling." What a pitiable object does he become who is so under under the influence of poison that he is no longer himself! Fire burns him, yet so insensible is he, that where a healthy man would be active in self-defence, *he* lays it not to heart (H. E. I., 4535, 4540). We take the meaning of the text to be, that the corrupt part of Israel had become so depraved by their sins that they were not to be roused even though they witnessed the judgments of God inflicting upon the nation the just penalties of their rebellions: "they laid it not to heart." It matters not whether we regard the judgment as a special interposition of God or as a natural result of sin, the doctrine is frequently illustrated in human experience. All sin carries with it a fire that burns the sinner; yet we see instances in which the sinner has been previously so hardened that he lays it not to heart, and the fire goes on burning him. *E.g.*,—

1. The fire of **Covetousness** takes hold upon some men. The just desire to secure a fitting recompense for honest effort is here distorted into a consuming fire of avarice. How seriously it deadens all the higher faculties of their nature. Selfishness is the centre of their life, and there they live in the midst of one raging desire, the desire for possessions, to the exclusion of God and divine things. Ponder this

picture of insensibility as drawn by Christ's own hand (Luke xii. 15–21).

2. The fire of **Lust** does deadly damage upon others. Here the lurid flames of unholy passion obtain the mastery where God's temple should be (1 Cor. vi. 19). The powers of body and mind sink down in debasement under the tyranny of this ruinous vice.

3. The fire of **Intemperance** has a destructive hold upon tens of thousands. And how insensible its victims become! Draw the too well known and familiar picture of a drunkard's life, and a drunkard's home. Health, property, reputation, comfort, all drop away: wife and family are debased; yet, whilst poverty and ruin are creeping over the scene, *he* can look upon it all with astonishing indifference. The fire burns him and his, yet he lays it not to heart.

These instances suggest many others. How fearfully true it is that men can live in such flames as these, and not lay it to heart.

They remain insensible—1. To all *Warning*. 2. To most *Impressive Examples* in the fate of others. 3. To most *Agonising Convictions* which now and then haunt even themselves.

CONCLUSION.—Where fire is concerned, prompt, earnest, and wise attention is the duty of the moment. If there be *some* feeling left, begin with that, and lay hold of recovering help.—*William Manning.*

CHEERING WORDS FOR THE AFFLICTED.

xliii. 1–3. *But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, &c.*

These cheering words were addressed by God to His peculiar people the Jews; but He has a peculiar people now, and all who partake of their faith and love may consider this Scripture as written for the purpose of imparting comfort and strength to their troubled hearts. It suggests four subjects for consideration: the afflictions to which the people of God are liable; the exhortation addressed to them; the promises by which it is strengthened; and the arguments by which it is enforced.

I. Compared with the miseries they have deserved, or with the weight of glory reserved for them, the afflictions of God's people are light (H. E. I. 3703, 3704); but in other points of view, they often appear sharp and heavy. The text implies, 1, *that these afflictions are certain;* that they not only may come, but will come. It speaks of them as things of course (H. E. I. 47–55, 3674). 2. That they may *be great:* deep as rivers, dangerous as rapid torrents. 3. *That they may be greatly diversified.* They may be in the waters to-day, and may have deliverance, but to-morrow they may have to walk through the fire and the flame; to endure trials which are unexpected and strange, and far more severe and bitter than any they have previously experienced.

II. How suitable and encouraging is the exhortation which is here addressed to us: "Fear not."

1. The power and greatness of Him from whom it proceeds gives to it a force which it would not otherwise possess. It comes from the only Being in the universe who can bless a sinner, or whom he has cause to fear.

2. The natural tendency of our trials is to excite fear. This fear may be innocent; it may lead us to avoid them, if God will, and if not, it will move us to circumspection and prayer. Such a fear our Saviour manifested in Gethsemane.

3. But there is a fear of another kind, and this we are here called on to lay aside: a fear which is the effect of unbelief, and the cause of murmurings, despondency, and wretchedness; a fear which tempts us to choose sin rather than affliction, which prevents us from praising God under our trials, and from trusting Him to bring is out of them.

III. This exhortation God supports and strengthens by two most gracious

promises. 1. *He promises His own presence with us in our trials.* "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee" (H. E. I. 198–202, 3677). 2. *He promises us preservation under all our calamities.* "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." What does this imply? That our trials shall not injure us. In proportion as they tend to become temptations, grace will be ministered to us, and they shall not overthrow us. Nay more; the very calamities which appeared likely to destroy every spiritual grace within God's people, to overwhelm their patience, their confidence and love, are made the very means of displaying and brightening them all (H. E. I. 204–214). By calling the suffering graces of His people into exercise, He will render them invincible. He will enable them to pass through rivers of trouble as safely as His beloved Israel passed through the Red Sea, and cause the fires of affliction to play as innocently around them as they played around His three servants in the furnace at Babylon.

IV. In the greatness of His condescension, God vouchsafes to add to His precious promises several arguments to assure us of their fulfilment.

1. The first is drawn from *the relation in which He stands to us as our Creator.* "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel." He created us naturally, and has re-created His people spiritually (ver. 21; Eph. ii. 10). Here, then, is a solid ground of confidence. The Father of our spirits must be well acquainted with our infirmities and weakness (Ps. ciii. 13, 14; Isa. lxiii. 9). Neither will He ever forsake the work of His own hands. He raised us out of the ruins of the Fall, made us temples in which He delights to dwell and be worshipped; and He will never suffer the structures which He has erected at so much labour and cost to be thrown down by violence, or worn away by storms (Ps. cxxxviii. 8; 1 Pet. iv. 19).

2. The Almighty draws another argument from *the property which He has in His people and the manner in which He acquired it.* "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." We are His by redemption also. And what a mighty price did He pay for us! He gave "Egypt for the ransom" of His ancient people, "Ethiopia and Seba for them." But when we were to be redeemed, kingdoms and empires were too poor a ransom (Rom. viii. 32; Acts xx. 28). Hence He estimates us, not by what we are, but by what we have cost Him. Will He abandon that which cost Him so dear? (Zech. ii. 8).

3. *The covenant which God has formed with His people ensures the fulfilment of His promises.* "FOR I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour;" thus implying that He has entered into some engagement with His Israel; that He considers Himself bound to be with them in their troubles and distresses; that His own veracity and faithfulness are at stake, and would be sacrificed if Israel were forsaken or injured.

REFLECTIONS. 1. *How rich in consolation is the Word of God!* 2. *How essential to our happiness is a knowledge of our interest in the divine promises* (H. E. I. 306–308). 3. *How full of confidence and praise ought they to be, who live in the enjoyment of the divine presence in the hour of trouble!* It is tranquillising and sweet to have a beloved friend near us when our sorrows are multiplied upon us, but what is the presence of the dearest earthly friend, when compared with the presence of a sympathising God! 4. *How blind to their own interest are they who reject the gospel of Christ!*—*Charles Bradley: Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 266–285.

I. The most eminent piety, the most exalted privileges, form no ground of exemption from the heaviest trials.—God, by His prophet, in this chapter multiplies descriptions of the

character and dignity of His people, and yet in the same breath speaks of the severe trials that await them. The people of God have had to *pass through* severe trials; not merely to hear about them, &c., but to endure them. Abraham (Gen. xxii. 2). Jacob (Gen. xxxvii. 32). Martha and Mary (John xi. 1, &c.)

1. *Let us not presume upon exemption from them* (H. E. I. 234–236, 3361, 3674).

2. *Let us not wonder if trial increases in weight and severity.* This may be intimated in the text—waters, *rivers;* fire, *flame.* There is an ascent in the path of suffering, a graduated scale of sorrow. Trials are proportioned according to our strength; to our missing the improvement of former calamities; to our insensibility to chastisements (Amos iv.)

II. The supports which God furnishes are equal to the utmost emergency in which we can be placed. "I will be with thee." *Enough!*

1. *Enough to temper the excess of trial, and to enable us to bear up under it.* The text engages that the trial shall not reach beyond a certain point: "they shall not overflow thee." Our supports shall be in every way equal to our necessity. Mr. Cecil says: "I shall never forget the encouragement when standing by the dying bed of my mother. I asked her, 'Do you not tremble at entering an unknown world, not knowing what you shall meet there?' 'It is no matter what I shall meet there,' was her answer; 'He hath said, *when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee'*" (H. E. I. 198, 3677).

2. *Enough to sanctify the calamities to the promotion of our highest interest* (H. E. I. 215, 3696–3701).

III. The promise of support is as certain as the trial is inevitable (Numb. xxiii. 19). "I will be with thee," &c. Apprehended, this promise induces resignation, prayer, commitment to God, hope.—*Samuel Thodey.*

I. The character of the people to whom this promise is made. "Jacob," "Israel." II. What God has done for them in time past; or what are the steps which He has taken to make them what they are. He has *created* them; He has *redeemed* them; He has *called them by their names.* Therefore He calls them *His;* "Thou art mine." III. What He promises to do for them in time to come.—*Daniel Rees: Sermons,* pp. 136–156.

We have here God's redemption, calling, and adoption of His people set forth as a ground of fearlessness in danger, and of comfort in the season of greatest distress.—*Charles Neat: The Protestant Preacher,* vol. iii. pp. 383–390.

Grounds of Confidence in God.

xliii. 1, 2. *But now thus saith the Lord, &c.*

I. Here we have four distinct grounds of confidence in God. 1. *Our creation:* "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel; fear not." 2. *Our redemption:* "For I have redeemed thee." 3. *Our calling:* "I have called thee by thy name." 4. *Our adoption:* "Thou art mine." Are not all these the very strongest grounds of confidence in God?

1. Shall we not trust in Him who created us? The ungodly indeed can derive no confidence from the consideration of God having formed them; their relation to Him renders their rebellion against Him an incalculable evil (H. E. I. 4488–4489). A man must be renewed and reconciled to God before his creation can be judged a proper ground of confidence in Him. But it should be rested on by those who have received the atonement. Is it possible that He who made you, and whose forfeited favour as your Creator has been restored to you, can ever leave you or forsake you? Shall He become the Father of your spirits,

and suffer your spirits, and souls, and bodies to perish?

2. If creation is a ground of confidence in God to them who are reconciled to God and bear His image, what must redemption be? What a magnificence of love, grace, mercy, compassion, holiness, and justice do we behold in this wonderful transaction! Is it to be supposed that redeeming mercy, surmounting every obstacle to the salvation of a sinner, can suffer you, in all the helplessness of your corrupted nature, to be driven to and fro with every wind of passion, and at last to be destroyed for ever! No! if you would calculate the extent of the divine assistance offered to the people of God, you must calculate upon the scale of redemption (H. E. I. 4631–4632; P. D. 3204).

3. In calling you by His grace, God has given you a personal interest in the redemption of His Son, and in all the blessings of His salvation. The unspeakable condescension, friendship, and tenderness which God in this heavenly calling manifests are strikingly declared here: "I have called thee *by thy name.*" When you call each other by your proper names, you do not by this signify more familiarity, benignity, and confidence than God does in calling you by them. He speaks to you, as to Abraham His friend; when He addressed Abraham by name, He did not feel more love for him than He feels for you day by day, continually. Why should you fear, whom He calls by your names? He has thus made your redemption and all its blessings His personal concern.

4. He who has called you by your names has adopted you into His family. "Thou art mine," my servant, my child, mine heir, the heir of mine everlasting kingdom. What can be a higher ground of confidence in God than adoption into His family, than the endearing and exalting relation of a child? What condescension and mercy in God, thus to select one of the tenderest relations in life, by which to illustrate the nature of His love to us! (ch. xlix. 15).

II. On these grounds God exhorts His people to display a fearless fortitude when they are exposed to trials: "Fear not."

III. In order to render it easier for them to manifest the courage which His children may well be expected to display, He adds gracious promises which should be to them a pillar of fire, to illuminate, guide, keep, and cheer them in the wilderness, or in the deep waters, through which their passage to a better country has been marked out for them: verse 2. Right on to the end, they shall have His presence and protection.—*Miles Jackson: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 233–257.

Those relations of God to man which form the groundwork of the believer's obligations, are in this passage adduced as the foundations of his confidence and peace; and this fact shows, further, that the two must stand or fall together. Men should think of this before they seek to lower the strict requirements of God's law. We can only lower our estimate of what we ought to do for God, by first lowering our estimate of what God has done for us, and so stripping from our faith all that now raises it into heights above our reach, and depths beyond our fathoming. God is your Creator, Preserver, Saviour, King. These are the very grounds of the assured confidence of which the prophet speaks. Consider—

I. THE CHARGE GIVEN—"*Fear not.*" The quality of fear is described in the Scriptures under various aspects.

Thus it is spoken of sometimes as a feeling to be exercised. "Be not highminded, but fear;" and again as a thing to be avoided, "Fear not." There is the coward's fear, which cannot bear the very sight of danger. Such is the fear that makes a man shrink from examining into the true state of his soul before God, and that makes men hide from themselves the thought of death. There is another kind of fear, which never shows

itself till the time of actual trial comes; beforehand, it is arrogant and boastful, but sinks into despondency and despair when it is put to the test. God's people are free from both of these; they are deeply conscious alike of their danger and of the inadequacy of their own strength to meet it: but they stand fast, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." A righteous, godly fear, the believer has; but the cowardice of the world, which is loud to boast, and slow to act, and quick to doubt, he must never know. It becomes neither the dignity of his calling, nor the faithfulness of his God. The believer and the unbeliever are sharply separated in respect of the objects of their fear. The timid child and the courageous man both have fear; but the one fears a shadow: the other, that which, not to fear, would show the absence of a reasonable courage.

What things ought we to fear? Shall we fear the opposition and hatred of the world; those who can injure the body, but cannot touch the soul; pain, or sickness, or temporal misfortune? Those may do so who make this world their all, but not the believer, who recognises in them the medicines of the soul. Shall we fear the devil? Not with God on our side. Or death? Not so; for it is the gate of higher life, and introduces us to life's crown of glory. He who fears God need know no other fear. Such fear is not a base naked terror; it becomes a wondering reverence, and loses itself in love; for He is not against His people, but for them; "Fear not, for I am with thee." But the absence of this fear makes everything else fearful.

II. THE REASON ASSIGNED. "*Thou art mine.*" These words were spoken to Israel after the flesh; yet, as the relations named—Creator, Redeemer, and Saviour—are not peculiar to them, but are realised by every believing heart, every believer may take to himself his share in this animating promise; for all these relations are adduced, not as reasons for anything we are to pay to God, but as reasons for that which we are to receive from Him,—they form the ground of our confidence (Ps. cxix. 94). The certainty of our hope does not depend on our holding God, but on God's holding us; it is not in our power to realise His promise at all times, but we may rest on the immutability of that promise (2 Tim. ii. 13). The believer's hope is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." To see to what a strong rock that anchor holds, turn your thoughts to the relationship spoken of in these words, "I am thy Creator, thy Redeemer, thy Saviour;" "I have called thee by thy name," words which imply a personal, immediate interest. All is His work; the goodness which created, the grace which has quickened, corrected, strengthened, taught, sanctified, has all come from Him!

III. THE PROTECTION PROMISED (ver. 2). This does not consist of any absence of trial and danger; the expressions of the text rather imply their presence, many in number, and varied in kind (Ps. lxix. 1, 2). No extraordinary interposition will preserve the child of God from those miseries "to which man is born as the sparks fly upwards." The protection promised consists in the constant presence with the soul of its unseen but Almighty Saviour (Ps. xvi. 8; Heb. xiii. 5, 6).

CONCLUSION.—Contrast the condition of the believer, and of the unbeliever. Affliction is the lot of all; but while a man loses nothing, in the calculation of earthly happiness, by becoming a follower of the Saviour, in the calculation of heavenly happiness he gains all. There is more sunshine, even in this world, to the righteous than to the unrighteous. Both have to share the "ills that flesh is heir to;" but what a difference in the strength of the two to meet them! If for a moment the Christian's heart sinks, then the promise comes back to him like a refreshing breath from above—"Fear not; for I have redeemed thee."—*Edward Garbett, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 204–222.

DIVINE CONVOY.

xliii. 2. *When thou passest through the waters, &c.*

I. THE PATHWAY THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE CALLED TO TREAD. Through waters and fires; used in the Scriptures as emblems of troubles and sorrows (Acts xiv. 22). 1. *Temporal troubles.* You can scarcely look into the narrowest circle of your acquaintance without finding sorrows, losses, cares, broils, contentions, all the fruits of sin (H. E. I. 47–51). 2. *Spiritual troubles.* Consciousness of utter inability to comply with the demands of the fiery law. Satan's suggestions and temptations.

The troubles of life are—1. to the ungodly, judicial punishments; 2. to God's people, fatherly corrections, or trials of their faith (1 Pet. i. 7; H. E. I. 66–70; 3678–3684).

II. THE UPHOLDING POWER THAT BEARS THEM ALONG. "I will be with thee." Two views may be taken of this precious promise: there is such a thing as God being with His people, and they not knowing it; and there is such a thing as their sensible enjoyment of it. 1. God never deserts the objects of His love. But there have been many instances in which His people have had added to their trials the terrible fear that He had deserted them (Lam. iii. 8; Ps. lxxvii. 7–9; Job xxiii. 8, 9; H. E. I. 1644–1657). 2. But to those who humbly wait upon Him, He reveals His presence with them; and in *that* they find all they need to sustain them, and heaven begun below.

III. THE TERMINUS WHERE THE PATHWAY OF GOD'S PEOPLE WILL END. It is a mercy that the promise is "when thou passest *through*," not merely *into*. God's elect pass through waters and rivers, fires and flames, but they get to the other side. And what is found there? The rest that remaineth for the people of God (H. E. I. 2792, 2793; P. D. 1784).—*Joseph Irons: Grove Chapel Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 289–299.

I. THE WATERS AND RIVERS WHICH ARE IN THE CHRISTIAN'S WAY. (α)

"Waters" and "rivers" are employed metaphorically in two opposite senses. Because, in a warm climate especially, waters are so necessary to allay the thirst of man, and to cool and invigorate the body enfeebled by excessive heat, and are so calculated to beautify the landscape and to diffuse fertility, everything that is comfortable and joyous is shadowed forth by "waters," "rivers," "streams" (ch. xli. 18). But in other places, as here, by "waters" and "rivers" we are to understand afflictions and tribulations; because waters, which are so beneficial, when in over-abundance are so noxious; and because he who has to pass through them has a difficult and hazardous task to perform, and he who is plunged into them is in imminent risk of his life.

1. *The waters of affliction are numerous.* The Christian in his progress towards heaven has not one river only to pass through; there are many, including the Jordan, that lie between him and that happy land (Ps. xxxiv. 19; H. E. I. 3661, 3674).

2. *They are often deep.* Every stream is not a brook; there are rivers as well as rivulets; and all afflictions are not "light." The stream is easily passed over in summer months, or when the sky is serene and settled, compared with what it is in the midst of winter, or when it overflows its banks in consequence of the descending torrents. When it goes well with the soul, and the Christian walks "in the light of God's countenance," and "in the fellowship of Christ," and "in the comforts of the Holy Ghost," the waters of trouble are easily forded; they seem not half so deep as at other times when the heavens above, as well as the things on earth, frown upon him. The union of many streams occasions a greater depth of water than can be found in any of them singly;

and how deep must be the affliction of that saint who meets with combined distress of body and of soul (Ps. xlii. 7; Jonah ii. 3).

3. *They are frequently muddy.* When the waters of a river are most plentiful they are usually least limpid, and the traveller who has to pass through them, besides the uneasiness which he suffers from perceiving their increased quantity, is distressed because he can neither see the bottom nor conjecture their depth. How often in times of affliction is it thus with the saints! The designs of Providence are wrapt up in obscurity. Their eye is unable to discover the reasons of the Divine controversy with them; neither can their anxious minds form any idea of that depth and severity of distress which they must yet suffer before they obtain deliverance.

4. *They are in many places broad.* The river is often confined by the height of its banks within a narrow channel, and whatever be the difficulty of passing through, the traveller soon reaches the further side; but at other times it spreads itself out to a great extent, and it is not till after many a weary step that he reascends to the dry land. The waters of affliction often extend over a great space (Ps. xc. 15, lxxxviii. 15). It is no small addition to trouble of any kind, when it is lengthened out. The soul is ready to faint because of its continuance; faith, patience, and hope are ready to die out (Ps. xiii. 1, 2). Indeed in no case can we see the further bank of the river of trouble. A mist hangs over it. When we enter it, we can never say how long it will be before we reascend out of it. This only we know, that when the journey of life is finished, we shall be delivered out of all tribulation, and "the days of our mourning shall be ended."

5. *They are at certain seasons exceedingly rapid.* They sometimes descend upon the saint with all the rapidity of a torrent, and ere he is aware he is in the midst of great distress. As in Job's case, the messengers of woe come running unto us at a time when all is quiet, and we looked for joy (Job xxx. 14, 26, 31). Even when the soul enters the stream with full warning of what it is to meet with, it is often found more rapid than was supposed, and descends with a force which it is not easy to sustain (H. E. I. 54, 55).

II. THE PASSING THROUGH THE WATERS.

1. *There is no getting to heaven without passing through the waters.* The heavenly land, like Canaan to Abraham when he dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees, "lies beyond the flood," and through this we must pass before we can enter in and possess it. Affliction is the portion of saints in this world. Each of them in his order seems to say with Jeremiah, "I am the man that hath seen affliction." The Great Head of the Church Himself passed through many waters of tribulation (ch. liii. 3).

2. *Some saints on their way to heaven pass through more rivers of trouble than others.* Travellers who set out to the same place from different parts of the country pass through tracts different in their form and scenery, and some meet with rivers which others avoid. The Lord, in wisdom and sovereignty, diversifies the lot of His people.

3. *The travellers to Zion pass through the same waters at different stages of their journey.* The rivers *wind.* Hence they are met by the travellers from different parts at earlier or later periods, at greater or less distances. Let us not take it for granted that because we have never experienced trials against which others have had to contend, therefore we shall never meet with them.

4. *Through the very same waters of affliction the Christian in his journey has often more than once to pass.* We ought not to imagine that, because we have been in any particular period afflicted in a certain manner, we shall no more experience that distress. The waters through which you have already passed may wind about, and you may have to pass through them yet again. Never think yourself secure

against any one trial, temptation, or affliction, while you are so far from the house of your heavenly Father.

5. *The Christian, in passing through the waters and the rivers, much needs a guide and helper.* Without one, he could never pass through them in safety. His own wisdom, courage, and strength are utterly unable to resist the impetuosity of the torrents that assail him. His fellow-Christians need the same assistance as himself. His help can come only from Him who says here: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

III. THE PROMISED PRESENCE OF GOD DURING THE CHRISTIAN'S PASSAGE THROUGH THE WATERS.

1. *It is the presence of God Himself which is promised.* Not merely by means of instruments. The Lord has more love to His people than to leave any of them to pass through the waters with no other comforter or helper than the best of men, or even the greatest angels. Their wisdom, power, and grace are finite, limited, and insufficient for an undertaking so arduous. *He* has therefore promised to be with them, and this is everything.

2. *It is the special presence of God which is promised to be with them.* By His essential presence God fills heaven, earth, and hell, upholding and governing all things. But if the promise has any meaning or comfort in it, it is a promise of special presence; a promise of His presence as a God of grace and love. How big with comfort, help, and deliverance is our text when thus understood! In the time of trouble, we wish our friends to be near us. Yet, often their sympathy cannot remove our anguish, nor their help effect our deliverance. But when we have God with us, He can do for us all we need.

3. *It is the presence of the Lord in all distresses which is here promised.* Were there one river through which a saint had to pass in which he had not reason to expect the Divine presence, he would have cause to be afraid. But as His presence is intended for the consolation and salvation of His people, the promise reaches to every kind of distress.

4. *It is His presence at all times which is promised.* He is not like a stranger who occasionally appears for the relief of those who are struggling with the stream, and are ready to be swept away by it. No, He abides with His people (ch. liv. 10; Ps. cxxxviii. 7).

5. *The promise guarantees the presence of God with all the saints when passing through the waters.* Partialities are unknown with our God. He loves all His children, and He will provide deliverance for them all. If this promise was made for any, it was for them that especially need His presence and help. The more helpless thou art in thyself, the greater is the evidence that He intended it for thee.

IV. THE HAPPY CONSEQUENCES OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITH THE SAINTS WHEN THEY PASS THROUGH THE WATERS.

1. *He guides and directs them.* It is His general promise to His people: "I will guide thee with mine eye;" and if there is any season in which they need Divine counsel and heavenly guidance, it is in the season of distress. But then He gives it to them as He did to Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xx. 12; H. E. I. 176).

2. *He comforts them* (H. E. I. 202; P. D. 93).

3. *He sanctifies to them the waters of affliction.* Since God is with him, the swelling waters purify the believer, and cannot destroy him; they fit him for heaven, and cannot prevent his progress to it. Many, besides David, instead of suffering by affliction, have come up out of the waters "like flocks of sheep which go up from the washing" (H. E. I. 116).

4. *He strengthens them to pass through the waters.* Cry then unto Him (Ps. xx. 1, 2).

5. *He delivers them from the waters.* They cannot deliver themselves. But they are not therefore lost in the deep waters (Ps. xxxiv. 6). Deliverance comes not always as soon as they

desire it; but it comes in due season; it never comes too late. In the most unexpected moment, in the most unexpected manner, He appears for their deliverance; so singular is it sometimes that they can scarcely credit it (Ps. cxxvi. 1-3). He does not always deliver them from every river into which they enter. He permits some one or other of them to carry them down the stream till they reach the waters of Jordan. But there they do not perish. He gives them victory over death, and by means of this deliverance sets them free from all their troubles.—*James Peddie, D.D.: Discourses*, pp. 395–424.

It is assumed that God's people will pass through the waters and through the fire. These elements, so useful as friends, so terrible as enemies, represent trouble and distress. Water may be too deep to ford, the practised swimmer may be overpowered. Within the grasp of fire, injury, destruction, death are speedily accomplished. The sufferer is sometimes like one aroused from sleep in a burning house. Despair seizes him. Those who have no God, or whose faith fails to realise His sufficiency, relinquish effort and hope. The antidote is found in God's all-sufficient promises. Here is one that assures believers of the Divine presence in trouble, and the Divine deliverance from it.

I. THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN TROUBLE. What is it in our nature that finds a relief in the presence of a friend in times of deepest sorrow? In the first burst of sorrow, the heart must be left alone. It prefers to be alone. The nearest earthly friend must not intrude on the sacredness of its grief. But the time comes when it craves for sympathy. The presence of a friend, even if no word is spoken, exerts the mysterious influence that brings relief and consolation. At suitable time and in suitable manner, there will be the sympathetic word. Perhaps the substantial aid. Whether or not, there will be the restful feeling of the weak when they depend upon the strong.

Your friend's trouble may have been the hopeless ruin of his fortune. You could do nothing for him. But you made it in your way to call upon him. He will never forget it. He is sick; and time, to the sick, is weariness. You visited him. Dear to Paul the apostle were those friends who were not ashamed of his chain; who visited him in imprisonment and ministered to his wants. It is not merely that there is society to relieve the tedium of solitude, and divert attention from the presence of sorrow. Any one might do that. But more is wanted. A stranger, or one to whom the sufferer is personally indifferent, could not convey the mysterious influence that has help and comfort in it. The comfort comes from the consciousness that the presence is that of a friend.

Now, God is the best of friends. It is the privilege of believers to call Him friend. By faith their sins are forgiven. They are reconciled to Him. By His grace they are born again. The old enmity of their hearts is abandoned. Its place has been taken by love. Fellowship with God is the Christian's joy. His friendship reflects glory on those who are honoured with it. It is this Friend who says, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee." We cannot see Him. Sight is not necessary to the conscious presence of even an earthly friend. The room may be dark, not a word may be spoken, not a sound heard; but we feel that he is there; the influence is the same as if we saw him. God's conscious presence fills the soul with faith, hope, peace. It is the consciousness of love and sympathy. It is the invisible, secret, gentle power of His Spirit that gives calmness and strength while trouble is pressing most heavily, and while external circumstances are the most distressing. "I will be with thee" (H. E. I. 198, 3677).

II. THE DIVINE DELIVERANCE FROM TROUBLE. If the believer is called to pass through the waters, they shall not overflow him; if he is called to walk through the fire, he shall not be burned, nor shall the flames kindle upon

him. Trouble may come: but he shall be brought through at the last. It may seem like a miracle. It is like saying the action of fire and water shall be so controlled that their natural result shall not follow. No difficulty, no trouble is so great that the Lord cannot effect a deliverance; in some unexpected way deliverance shall come. The day is overcast with gloomy clouds; the atmosphere is depressed; the rain comes in torrents; the wind sweeps down houses and trees before it; universal wreck seems impending; when unexpectedly the storm abates, wind and rain cease, the clouds separate, a genial warmth is diffused, the sun shines out, the storm is forgotten. "All things work together for good to them that love God." He suffers His people to pass through fire and water, not only that He may display His power and love in their deliverance, but often, because the fire and the water lie in their way to some good exceeding what they have ever enjoyed; which, without it, could not have been reached. Sickness is sometimes the pathway to health; temporal calamity to prosperity; sorrow to established Christian character; spiritual distresses to a profounder realisation of spiritual blessings. The cross prepares for the crown. Death is the gate of life.

Oh, how many such deliverances are recorded in the sacred history! Joseph from prison. The bush burned, but was not consumed. The children of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan. Daniel from the lions' den. The three Hebrew youths in the furnace of fire; but there was one with them "like the Son of God, and therefore upon their bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed." Fire cannot burn, water cannot drown those whom the Lord preserves. Nothing can prevent the fulfilment of His word.

Consider the grounds on which your confidence may repose—

1. *His purpose.* The salvation of His people from every evil is part of His redeeming plan. Everything is subordinate to this. Hindrances have been swept away. He has spared no expense. "I gave Egypt for thy ransom. Ethiopia and Seba for thee." He gave His Son.

2. *His faithfulness.* You can plead His word of promise. The truth of His nature is pledged. He will do as He has said.

3. *His love.* Is He not thy Father? He loves His children. His heart is set on their salvation. Will not love do all that is necessary?

4. *His power.* He can sweep away all material and spiritual hindrances that lie in the way. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

But there must be faith. God's promises are made to faith. The blessing is according to faith. Let your mind rest in the promises in every time of distress, whatever its nature, assured that either He will remove it or overrule it, so that a blessing shall come through it. If there are losses, disappointments, bereavements, soul-troubles, the solemn hour of death, His presence, and His delivering power shall be the sufficient antidote.—*J. Rawlinson.*

God's grace never shines so brightly as when it shines through the cloud of His people's sins. Nor does it ever appear so glorious as when displayed in the depth of their unworthiness. When nature is at the lowest, grace is generally at the highest. When God has threatened His people for their sins, or chastened them for their follies, He then generally steps in with some revelation of His grace, or makes some precious promise. This was the case with Israel of old, whom God had visited with sore and terrible judgments; and then, instead of utterly consuming them, He comes forward and says, "When thou passest," &c.

I. THE PILGRIM'S PAINFUL LOT. He has to pass through deep, sore, and successive trials. Persecution, temptations, conflict within. Temporal trials: losses, crosses, disap

pointments, and vexations. The fire tries the metal, and separates it from the dross, &c. So the believer's trials refine him, &c.

II. THE LORD'S GRACIOUS PROMISE. "I will be with thee." Nothing is so much needed, nothing so much prized by the believer in affliction, as the presence of God. 1. *To direct thy steps*, for I know all the way. 2. *To strengthen thy faith*, for I know how weak and feeble it is. 3. *To cheer thy heart*, for I know all thy sorrows. 4. *To secure thy benefit*, for I will surely do thee good. 5. *To bring thee safely through all*, and lead thee safe to glory.

CONCLUSION.—Our trials will sweeten home. Heaven will make amends for all. Whatever happens, God is still our Father, and we are His beloved children.—*James Smith.*

(a) In most parts of our country, ingenuity and labour have been employed to lessen the fatigues and remove the dangers of travelling. Roads are cut through woods and morasses, and over mountains; inns are established; and bridges are thrown over rivers and brooks. But in countries which are thinly inhabited, or into which the improvements of modern times have not been introduced, travelling is full of danger and of toil. The stranger, if he has not a guide, is in perpetual uncertainty, is harassed by apprehensions; and if he reach his destined place, it is not till he is almost exhausted by fatigue, and after many hair-breadth escapes. At one time, he is almost faint with hunger; at another, he is parched with thirst; at another, either benumbed with the cold, or scorched by the heat, or overpowered by the severity of the storm, before he can reach a place of shelter, or find the necessary refreshments of nature. Now, he knows not at what place he shall enter the forest, to avoid being torn by the briars and thorns, or entangled in some impenetrable thicket. Then, he hesitates whether the thick mire be not too deep for him, or the marshy ground may not sink beneath his feet. In a little while he is distressed how he shall, by the best and easiest path, ascend the steep and woody mountain; or how, in descending, he shall avoid the precipices which appear below. Again, he arrives at the banks of some deep and rapid river, or approaches some torrent descending from the mountains, and swelled by the winter floods; and how he shall descend, and where he shall pass through, and whether the waters be fordable, or the streams be not too rapid, are questions which distress his mind and fill him with anxiety and fear.

Many such impediments were in the traveller's way; and to many such hazards was he exposed in Canaan, and especially in the countries adjacent, many of which were mountainous and waste. On this account, frequent allusions to this state of things are made by the Spirit of God in scripture, especially in describing the Christian life. The Christian is represented as a man travelling through the waste howling wilderness to Immanuel's land. . . . Many a mountain of difficult duty has he to ascend, and many a steep of painful suffering has he to descend on his way to his heavenly home. Many waters of deep distress, which sometimes rush unexpectedly upon him, like torrents from the mountains, and threaten to sweep him away into destruction, has he to pass through.—*Peddie.*

GOD'S APPRAISEMENT OF HIS PEOPLE.

xliii. 4. *Since thou wast precious, &c.*

We learn here—1. That nations and armies are in the hand of God and at His disposal. 2. That His people are dear to His heart, and that it is His purpose to defend them. 3. That the revolutions among nations, the rise of one empire and the fall of another, are often in order to promote the welfare of His Church, to defend it in danger, and deliver it in time of calamity. 4. That His people should put the utmost confidence in Him as being able to defend them, and as having formed a purpose to preserve and save them.—*A. Barnes.*

FOREBODINGS FORBIDDEN.

(*A Motto Text for the New Year.*)

xliii. 5. *Fear not, for I am with thee.*

Again we enter upon the dark of uncertainty. Standing upon the threshold of another year, which we know by experience will have its cares, and its perils, and its sorrows. What is the true antidote of fear? What is

the real elixir of the happiness we wish to one another but the presence and protection of the Lord? This He guarantees to us: "Fear not, for I am with thee."

I. FEAR IS NATURAL TO MAN.

1. As a *feeble creature* in the midst of the irresistible and mysterious powers of the universe. What can allay this fear but the protection of One who can control those forces, who is mightier than they, and will use that might in my behalf?

2. As a *sinner*, conscious of violations of the law of the Great Ruler, and therefore justly apprehensive of the divine displeasure. The religion of the Bible reveals the Creator as a Saviour, delighting in mercy. Thus the real language of the Bible is, Fear not. To Abraham, Isaac, Joshua, Gideon, &c. In all these exhortations not to fear, the reason given is Jehovah's presence; but it is that very presence that makes the conscious sinner afraid (Gen. iii. 8). Yet in the Bible the presence of God is urged as a dissuasive against fear. Because God is revealed to us as merciful, &c. —in Jesus Christ as the Saviour and the friend of sinners.

II. THOSE QUALITIES WHICH RENDER THE PRESENCE OF GOD AN ANTIDOTE TO FEAR.

The power which any one possesses to dissipate fear by his presence depends upon the qualities of that person, his ability and his willingness to help. The character of God is what He is in Himself, what He has already done, and what He has promised to do; it is this which gives force to the exhortation, "Fear not, for I am with thee."

III. SOME OF THOSE OCCASIONS TO WHICH THE EXHORTATION IS SPECIALLY APPLICABLE.

The first Sabbath of the year. We walk forward in darkness; what that darkness conceals we cannot even conjecture. Fear may suggest various evils. God says, "Fear not, for I am with thee." To some the year is sure to prove one of severe trial. To some this year will be the last on earth.

CONCLUSION.—Appeal to those who do not regard the presence of God as the chief element of their joy, as that which chiefly will make the year a happy one.—*Newman Hall, LL.B.*; *The Christian World, January* 8, 1864.

GOD'S CALL, OUR DIRECTORY.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

xliii. 6. *I will say to the south, Keep not back.*

I. THE GRANDEUR OF THE SPEAKER. "*I* will say." Who is He? The tone He assumes is that of one who need only *speak* to be heard, felt, and obeyed through all nature. It is He who is the great I AM; in comparison with whom the universe, with all its furniture, is as nothing, &c. Such an agent, such a friend, one so high and unspeakable, suffices you. But *what* will He *say?* or, what will He *do?* He promises to interest Himself in the conversions of the heathen, to bless our attempts for their conversion. How divinely pleasant and supporting! What more do you ask? But *how* will He speak? Not merely to the understanding, but to the conscience and heart; to all the secret springs of our nature; so as to make converts not to the sect of the Nazarenes, but to righteousness; not to Christianity only, but to Christ. Take two or three instances: St. Matthew, St. Paul. Are you converted to Christ? Without it, perish you must everlastingly (Matt. xviii. 3, &c.) We see the grandeur of the speaker in these and all similar instances.

1. Does the ineffable JEHOVAH Himself promise to speak in this manner? Then, let us not regret the want of miracles to convert the heathen. The promise suffices alone. What greater

miracle than conversion itself? Be content with *these* miracles, and expect them from Him who says, "I will say," &c.

2. Does He promise His efficiency in converting the heathen, on the supposition that we become His organ? Then, let us no longer blame Him for the partial communication of the Gospel. As was said by the Israelites to Pharaoh, "The fault is in thine own people." The Gospel is committed to us *in trust*.

You whisper, "But if success is thus indefinitely assured to Gospel missions, none can fail of effect." I answer—(1.) None do fail altogether. (2.) The promise in the text, and every similar one, implies that, though God will command success, it shall be through a fit instrument. (3.) God will work in a way worthy His infinite wisdom as well as goodness. Duty is our province; events of time, &c., belong to Him.

II. THE GLORY OF THE THING SPOKEN.

"I will say to the *south*." No particular country is specified. Better so, than otherwise. "The south," *amongst* the cardinal points of the world—the east, west, north. In those verses (5, 6) we have a grand promise of universal conversion.

"I will say to the south, *Keep not back*." This implies—

1. Something divinely tender and affecting. "I am your Maker and Saviour — essential love; and wait upon you, to unite you to myself and to all the flower of being in the universe," &c. Can infidelity propose a greater good to mankind than the Gospel?

2. He will say to the south as He says to us, "Bring out your dead, deliver up all your vices, keep none of them back." The design of Jesus Christ is to redeem from all iniquity.

3. That there is a disposition in the south to do the contrary. They have not only the common corruption of our nature to contend with, but the prejudice of ages to keep them back from the Gospel. Then, every exertion on our part is necessary. The natural and strong predilection of the heathen for their own ancient system.

In this work nothing can be lost. Nothing less will be gained than *eternal glory*, for millions upon millions in the South Seas will be won.—*T. Prutycross, A.M.: The Pulpit*, vol. v. pp. 161–172.

GOD'S WITNESSES.

xliii. 10. *Ye are my witnesses.*

This is what Jesus says to us. He has left His fame in our hands (Acts i. 8). He could have done without us. But He has chosen the weak things to witness as to what He has done and is doing now.

I. WHY GOD HAS CHOSEN A BELIEVER FOR THIS WORK. Because—1. He knows experimentally more of God than any other being. Angels could witness of His majesty and goodness. Devils, of His wrath and justice. All men, of His wisdom. But a child of God, while witnessing to all these, can tell of His *forgiving* love, &c. 2. He can have no greater joy. 3. On account of our being constantly in the presence of our fellow-men. He would have the world without excuse.

II. THE THINGS A BELIEVER MUST POSSESS IN ORDER TO WITNESS FOR CHRIST. 1. Knowledge. 2. Veracity. 3. Consistency. 4. Patience. 5. Boldness, firmness. (H. E. l. 3922–3976).

III. THE BEST METHODS CHRIST'S WITNESSES CAN ADOPT. A parade of private devotion? Learned expositions of your creed? Denunciation of your opponents? Seclusion in a hermit's cell? Nay. But rather—1. A daily manifestation of heart-loyalty to Christ. 2. A daily feeding on His promises, thus showing contentment and hope. 3. A daily growing in His likeness. 4. The daily display of the graces of His Spirit.—*R. A. Griffin: Stems and Twigs*, pp. 63.

One grand design of God in leaving Christians in the world after their conversion is, that they may be *witnesses for Him.* It is that they may call the attention of the thoughtless multitude to the subject, and make them see the difference in the character and destiny of those who believe and those who reject the Gospel.

I. TO WHAT PARTICULAR POINTS CHRISTIANS ARE TO TESTIFY FOR GOD.

Generally they are to testify to the truth of the Bible. They are competent witnesses to this, for they have experienced its truth.

But more particularly Christians are to testify—1. To the immortality of the soul. 2. The vanity and unsatisfactory nature of all earthly good. 3. The satisfying nature and glorious sufficiency of religion. 4. The guilt and danger of sinners. 5. The reality of hell, as a place of eternal punishment for the wicked. 6. The love of Christ for sinners. 7. The necessity of a holy life.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY ARE TO TESTIFY.

By precept and example. On every proper occasion by their lips, but mainly by their lives. Because example teaches with so much greater force than precept. They should live in their daily walk and conversation, as if they believed the soul to be immortal, &c.

Remarks.—1. Sinners will never feel right on the subject of religion, unless God's witnesses rise up and testify. 2. We see why preaching does so little good. 3. The standard of Christian living must be raised. 4. Every Christian makes an impression by his conduct, and witnesses either for one side or the other. 5. It is easy to see why revivals do not prevail.—*C. J. Finney: Revivals, Lecture X.*

ONE LORD AND SAVIOUR.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

xliii. 11. *I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no Saviour.*

I. This is a declaration that is now needless in many parts of the world. All the civilised nations are convinced that, if there is a God at all, there is only one God. What an intellectual advance! In Isaiah's time, the monotheists were in a miserable minority. All the great nations had their god or gods. The depressed condition of the worshippers of JEHOVAH seemed to most people a sufficient proof that He was only *a* god, and a god inferior to others. Sennacherib's estimate of Him (2 Chron. xxxii. 10–15, "How much less!") seemed to have been ultimately justified. The men for whom this prophecy was intended knew that He had not delivered Jerusalem from the power of the worshippers of the Assyrian gods, *who ascribed their victories to those gods.* Hence it was necessary for them to protest against the belief that JEHOVAH was at the most only *a* god; to proclaim Him as the only living and true God (*verse* 12). This proclamation was not made in vain. Belief in Him as the only God and Saviour has been spreading ever since. Cured during their exile of their passion for idolatry, the Jews have ever since been His faithful and successful witnesses. The testimony first of those Jews to whom God had revealed Himself in Christ, and then of their converts, consigned to oblivion the gods of Greece and Rome, and has rendered idolatry impossible among the leading races of mankind. What a glorious intellectual advance! And what inestimable moral advances have been its results!

II. But it is a declaration that is still needful in many parts of the world. The world is not merely the particular portion of it in which we dwell. We are apt to think so. But we should look beyond the circle in which we are living. When we do so,

what do we see? Idolaters—millions of them. Polytheists still outnumber Monotheists. To this fact we must not be indifferent. For us, it is a call to duty. Knowing God, we must make Him known. It is for this purpose that He has mercifully revealed Himself to us (vers. 10–12). Shall we be silent concerning Him? *Zeal for His glory* forbids it. *Compassion for our fellow-men* forbids it. No greater benefit could we confer upon them. If we have no zeal for His glory, no compassion for our fellow-men, how dare we call ourselves God's people? how can we hope to dwell with Him in blessedness for ever when this short life is over?

Mission work is our duty. It would be our duty, if it were as hopeless an enterprise as was Isaiah's in his own day (ch. vi. 9, 10). But faithful witness-bearing for God has been in this century prolific of glorious results. Results of mission work in the South Seas, Madagascar, &c. So it will be. The task has the allurement of certain success. Let us address ourselves to it vigorously and with glad heart.

III. It is a declaration which we may make with even more confidence than did our fathers. The unity of God is being more and more clearly revealed to us. Science is the friend of religion. By it how wonderfully has our conception of the vastness of the universe been enlarged! How completely we have been convinced that it is in a *universe* we find ourselves, in an immense empire over which *one* Power rules. Marvellously varied are its provinces, but in each and all the same laws are in operation. Behind all these laws there is one Will (H. E. I. 2222, 3174). Nothing can oppose or evade it with success. The attempt is madness, and ends always in misery. Throughout all the revelations of science, God speaks to us precisely as He does in this chapter: "I, even I, am the Lord, . . . and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who will turn it back?"

Being so much more fully instructed than our fathers were, we should also be more clearly, confidently, and fervently witnesses for God.

IV. It is a declaration which we should not only make to others, but should lay to heart ourselves. Wonderful and glorious is the revelation given us in our text.

1. On one side, *it is an awful revelation.* It is an assertion of absolute authority, under which we must live and act: "I am the LORD!" Science bears especially this testimony, that we are in an empire where law is universally and indiscriminately administered (H. E. I. 3171). In God's kingdom there is no border-land, such as the strip that divided England and Scotland before the days of the Stuarts, where men may do very much as they please, without fear of government penalties; no realm of lawlessness such as the Highlands of Scotland were in the days of the Stuarts. God's authority is maintained everywhere; there is not one physical law of His which can be violated or disregarded without mischief. The testimony of Science and of Scripture is one and the same: *Sin and suffering are inseparably united.* This is as true in the moral and spiritual realm as in the physical; one Lord rules over all! (Numb. xxxiii. 23; Prov. x. 29, xi. 21; Rom. ii. 6–9; H. E. I. 3188, 4603–4610.)

To this revelation of God let us give heed. Let it govern our conduct. So will temptation be stripped of all its allurements and seductions (H. E. I. 4673–4676, 4754–4757). So we shall travel life's journey safely.

2. *To this revelation there is another side which is indeed a Gospel.* Were there no other voice than that of Science to address us, we should shudder as we listened; we are surrounded by so many possibilities of transgression, we are so prone to fall into them, and their results are so disastrous! Conscience would then be only an alarming force; it would haunt us with its testimony that we have already sinned against the Ruler who administers justice so inflexibly, and punishes transgression so relentlessly

But Scripture had another word to add; it reveals Him to us as the SAVIOUR: "I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no Saviour!"

1. *He is a Saviour.* By His very nature. "God is love"—practical love. He cannot behold His children in need, and sit idle; cannot listen unmoved to their cries for help (Ex. iii. 7, 8; H. E. I. 2303). In every time of trouble let us remember this, and be comforted and strengthened.

2. *There is no other Saviour.* Experience had been teaching this lesson to the captives in Babylon. When the power of Assyria and Babylon had begun to loom up before them and their fathers, and threatened to enslave and destroy them in their fear and unbelief, they had sought help from human powers, but had sought it worse than in vain (ch. xxx. 1–5, &c.)

Is not this a lesson we need to learn! In the time of temporal trouble or of spiritual conflict, how apt we are to look elsewhere than to God! But we look in vain. In neither kind of necessity can we do anything for ourselves (John xv. 5; H. E. I. 2358). Nor can our friends help, further than God pleases (Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4). Nor even in sacred things, apart from God, is there help for us (H. E. I. 3438–3442). In every time of need, let us trust in God *only* (Ps. lxii. 5; H. E. I. 172–176.)

3. *We need no other Saviour*, for He is an all-sufficient Saviour. This was the lesson the poor captives in Babylon needed. Not easy for them to learn it. Their case appeared hopeless. Think how the power of Babylon must have seemed to them (they were far weaker in comparison with it than is Poland now in comparison with Russia); how impossible that they should ever be set free from it! What they needed to be taught was, that in comparison with God, Babylon was nothing, and less than nothing; that when JEHOVAH was pleased to set them free nothing could withstand Him (*verses* 5, 6, 13–17). How completely and gloriously these promises were fulfilled, we know.

We also need to learn this lesson. Sometimes our distress is so great, that we are ready to believe that there can be *no* deliverance from it. But this despair and distrust in God is foolishness (Jer. xxxii. 17). The wiles of the devil are so subtle, his assaults so overwhelming, that we are disposed to cease from the conflict as a hopeless one. But again our fear is foolishness (2 Cor. xii. 9; Eph. vi. 10; Rom. viii. 37; H. E. I. 3363–2376.)

In God our Saviour let us rejoice with great joy, and let us hasten to make Him known to our fellow-men, whose needs are as great, whose conflicts are as severe, and whose perils are as terrible as our own.

GOD'S WITNESSES.

xliii. 12. *Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.*

Catch a view of the picture with which these words are connected, and then let us look at the sentiment in relation to ourselves. God is supposed to be observing the conduct of man in relation to Himself. He sees that almost everywhere He is virtually excluded from His own world, His place usurped by idols. He seems to say, "Shall this state of things be allowed to continue? Am I never to have my due? I will bring this matter to a test. I will assemble the whole world, and will call upon the nations who worship idols to produce their evidence of the deity of these things they worship, and I will call upon my own people to stand forth and give their testimony for Me. *I have given you proofs of the reality* of my existence; ye are therefore my witnesses. I will confront all idolaters with you, and you shall testify that I am God (verses 8–13).

I. THE CHURCH, whose internal blessedness is in God, and whose experienced blessedness is from Him, is under obligation to stand forth to the

world as giving a perpetual testimony for God. (H. E. I. 3903–3907.) 1. *She is able to do this.* Having been from the beginning the repository of the sacred documents, she can testify (1) that He gave *prophecies* which have been fulfilled in her history (verse 12); and (2) that He has wrought *miracles* on her behalf (verse 12). 2. *She does this*—(1) By the very fact of the assembly of her members for worship, she testifies to the world her confidence that "He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." (2) By her ordinances—preaching and the sacraments—she bears perpetual testimony with respect to the nature of religion, the condition of man, the claims of God, the principles on which God and man are to be harmonised and reconciled to each other.

II. THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN may be viewed in the same light. 1. The Christian may sometimes be called to give testimony for God in word, to a friend, or to an enemy (1 Pet. iii. 15). 2. Special calls may be made upon him to be a witness to God's faithfulness to His promises, and to the fact that He is the hearer and answerer of prayer (Ps. xviii. 6, xxxiv. 6, lxvi. 16). 3. Whether he will or no, by his habitual conduct he bears a testimony to the world as to his real belief concerning God. It ought deeply to impress our conscience that thus we are constantly giving either faithful or unfaithful testimony concerning Him.

III. In view of these facts, let us recognise and remember — 1. The honour God has put upon us in thus committing His character into our hands. 2. That thus we are brought into a wonderful resemblance to our Lord Himself. He is termed "the true and faithful Witness." While He lived on earth *He* gave such a representation of the character of God that He could say, "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father;" and it should be our ambition, by a close imitation of Him, also to show forth the glory of God, "full of grace and truth." 3. The obstacles, temptations, and dangers by which we are surrounded, that we may be on our guard against them. 4. The guilt of that professing Christian who by his inconsistencies gives a false witness for God, so that men looking at it can see nothing at all of the Divine character. How often have men of the world been hardened by regarding the false testimony which inconsistent Christians give (H. E. I. 1163, 1164, 4177). 5. The sinfulness of those divisions by which the power of the Church's testimony on behalf of God is broken (H. E. I. 1225, 2450). 6. The greatness of the reward of faithful witnesses for God (Matt. x. 32).

IV. Consider the character, the duty, and the doom of those who render this testimony of the Church necessary. 1. Your *character* is—opposers of God, deniers of God; refusing His claims and His rights, expelling Him from the very earth He has made. 2. Your *duty* is immediately to receive the testimony of the Church, and be led by it to an earnest inquiry into the claims of God upon you, and to a penitent, believing acceptance of the salvation He offers you. 3. If you will not do this, your *doom* will be that God will triumph over you; He will glorify Himself, His power, and His justice in your eternal destruction from His presence (2 Thess. i. 7–10; Ps. ii. 10–12).—*Thomas Binney.*

Before a great assembly—all the nations of the earth—the question to be decided is, which out of a host of rival gods is the living and true God? The mode of test is a crucial one, viz., *which out of these gods has foretold the future?* Plain prophecies are asked for—distinct predictions which could not be ascribed to human sagacity. The gods of the heathen fail; and Jehovah summons His people Israel to attest that the fortunes of their nation had been foretold and had fallen out as predicted (Gen. xv. 12–16, 18–21).

Christian believers may be regarded

as taking the place of ancient Israel; and in the widest sense they may be appealed to as God's witnesses in the great controversy going on between God and the world. Let us note—

I. Some of the questions upon which Christians are called to give evidence in favour of their God.

1. One of the first is this: *Is there distinct interposition of God on behalf of man, in answer to believing prayer?* The world is ready—too ready—to ridicule the idea. "Providence is a blind Fate, impartial alike in its severities and its bounties." Now, albeit there is the same event to the righteous and to the wicked, the former are ready to testify that in the same events there are distinct differences in God's dealings.

But the precise question is, whether or no God answers believing prayer. How many witnesses might be called to answer, Yes!

2. *What are the ultimate results of affliction?* The Christian holds that the woes of unbelievers are very different from the chastening sorrows of believers. He believes that he gains by his losses; he is ready to prove it from his own experience.

3. *Is the believer's life a joyful one?* What happy people other people must be, if Christians are melancholy! With all their trials they can rejoice in the Lord, and again and again rejoice.

4. The *moral tendencies of evangelical Christianity* are sometimes called in question. It is thought that the doctrine of free grace tends to make men think lightly of sin. "If God forgives sin so easily, men will sin more and more." But the world abounds with proofs to the contrary! Men hate sin most at the foot of the cross; they love holiness most when they feel that God has blotted out their sins like a cloud.

5. *The Christian religion is sometimes said to be antiquated:* "it has had its day." Now is the time for true believers to vindicate the manliness and force of their faith. They are "God's witnesses;" can Christianity no longer nourish heroes? Let us teach the world that we retain the old power among us.

6. It is our daily business to witness for God as to *whether or no faith in the blood of Jesus Christ really can give calm and peace to the mind.* Our hallowed peace must be the proof of that.

7. We shall be called one day to prove *whether Christ can help a man to die well or not.* A continuous faithful witness will make that last testimony indubitable.

II. Some suggestions as to the mode of witnessing. You *must* witness, if you be a Christian. *You are subpœna:* You will suffer for it if you do not. 1. *As a witness, you are required to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.* Speak the truth, but let your life be true, as well as your words. 2. *Direct evidence is always the best.* Second-hand Christianity is one of the worst things in the world. 3. *A witness must take care not to damage his own case.* Some Christian professors give very telling testimony the other way; but we are *God's witnesses!* Let our testimony be clear for Him. 4. *Every witness must expect to be cross-examined.* "He that is first in his own cause," says Solomon, "seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him." Therefore, watch!

III. There is another witness beside you. "Ye are my witnesses, and *my Servant whom I have chosen*" (Phil. ii. 7, 8). Witnesses for God are not solitary (Dan. iii. 25; Rev. i. 5). "I am the Truth," said Christ; in Him was no sin (John xiv. 30); His witness-bearing was perfect; He witnessed to Divine *justice;* read Christ's witness to God's love (1 John iv. 10); He could say—"He that hath seen *Me* hath seen the Father."

CONCLUSION.—1. Christians, make your lives clear! Be as the pellucid brook—not as the muddy creek. You need not tell men that you love them: make them feel it. 2. Our witness to those to whom this subject does not apply is, Except ye seek God in Christ, ye must perish; but if ye seek

Him, He will be found of you.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. xi. pp. 445–456.

(*A Sermon to Young Men.*)

"Ye," men of Judah, people of Israel, "are my witnesses"—witnesses that I am, and of what I am. All the nations round about you have corrupted themselves and gone astray, and worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. "*Ye* are my witnesses."

But God has other witnesses:—1. *Nature* (Rom. i. 20; Acts xiv. 17). 2. *Man's own soul.* Its capacities, its attributes, its aspirations, can neither be explained nor satisfied without God.

The world's greatest want is God. Man is made for God, and without God he cannot be a true and perfect man—his nature will be at once defiled and incomplete, and his experience more that of the animal than of the angel. Sooner far will you succeed in covering the earth with fruitfulness and beauty without light, than make human nature and society bright, pure, and blessed without God. We call on you, then, for your own souls' sake, for your country's sake, and for the world's sake, to become witnesses for God.—In those who would be witnesses for God, three things are necessary:—

I. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. Unless you know Him—not absolutely and perfectly,—that no finite mind, not even Gabriel's, can do; but as it hath pleased Him to make Himself known in His works and in His Word—you cannot bear witness of Him. If you would know Him truly, you must *study* the book in which He is revealed; study it as you would a history, a philosophy, or a science which you wish thoroughly to understand (H. E. I. 576–580).

II. STRONG FAITH IN GOD AND IN HIS CHRIST. Without such faith, Moses, the apostles, and the martyrs could not have witnessed for God as they did. Nor can you. The morals, practices, and spirit of our age render a deep and abiding faith essential to a stable and successful witnessing for God. Such a faith you cannot have by merely wishing for it. It is born of light and nursed in light. To be of the highest, truest, and strongest order, it must be born of the intellect and the heart. The surest means of begetting it is to have in your own souls the experience of the power of the Gospel to meet all the necessities of your moral nature. To this evidence of experience you should add a comprehensive knowledge of the varied and external evidences of your faith. Thus you will be able to give a reason for the faith that is in you (H. E. I. 1138–1149).

III. A WHOLE-HEARTED DECISION FOR GOD. "Be a whole man in everything," said Joseph John Gurney to his son,—"a whole man in the playground, and a whole man in the schoolroom." We must be whole men in witnessing for God. Vacillation and half-heartedness will make our testimony of none effect. There will be no need of roughness or ruggedness of character in order to all this. Jesus was very gentle. The most prominent Bible examples suggest to us, not the storms and tempest, but the quiet stream, ever deepening and growing, which flows on for ever. Moses, Joseph, the three true-hearted Israelites in Babylon—what they were in the fulness of their purpose to serve the Lord, and in the calm fearlessness with which they fulfilled their purpose, we must be. It is not required of us that, being firm as rocks, we should be as unfeeling. It is only required that we be as the well-rooted oak, which feels the stormy blast and tempest, but sends its roots the deeper, and grows the stronger, from the force which threatens its destruction.

Now, with these three things—knowledge of God, strong faith in God, and a whole-hearted decision for God—do you ask *what you have to do as witness-bearers?* You might almost as well ask what the sun has to do. What but to shine? The influence of the man in whom these three forces dwell will be felt, even if he put forth as little direct effort to make it felt as

does the violet when it perfumes the air. And yet the Christian has this great superiority over the sun, which sends forth his light through millions of miles of space, and over the flowers which fill plains and valleys with their fragrance—that he knows what he is and does, and means it all. He may, and does, consciously aim at a character of greater brightness and sweeter fragrance, and at making himself a more efficient instrument of the divine beneficence to mankind (H. E. I. 1089–1095).

With such aims and endeavours, "*How shall he bear witness for God?*" He will connect himself with a Christian church; he will take part in the common labours of the church; in the business of life he will be honest and honourable; he will strive, through Divine grace, to embody in his life the spirit and morals of the Sermon on the Mount. The man who is all this, and in his heart aims at all this, will be prepared to bear witness for God in every form and way that Providence may determine. He will not need to write "Christian" on his forehead; men will take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus.

Among such witnesses for God, we want greatly to enrol you.—*John Kennedy, D.D.: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. i. pp. 424–427.

The Eternity and Omnipotence of God.

xliii. 13. *Yea, before the day was, &c.*

The doctrine taught here is—1. That God is from everlasting—for if He was before *time*, He must have been eternal (H. E. I. 2253; P. O. 1493). 2. That He is unchangeably the same—a doctrine which is, as it is here designed to be used, the only sure foundation for the security of His people—for who can trust a being who is fickle? (H. E. I. 2254–2256, 2324, 2341). 3. That He can deliver His people always, no matter what are their circumstances. 4. That He will accomplish all His plans; no matter whether to save His people, or to destroy His foes. 5. That no one, man or devil, can hinder Him. 6. That opposition to Him is as fruitless as it is wild. If men wish for happiness, they must fall in with His plans, and aid in the furtherance of His designs.—*A. Barnes.*

The Future Better than the Past.

xliii. 19. *Behold, I will do a new thing, &c.*

God's messages to Israel are steeped in imagery supplied by their past experiences. From this familiar store the figurative expressions of the text are derived; it holds out a challenge to faith, a rebuke to unbelief.

I. **The emphasis of the promise lies in God's promise to do a NEW thing—*i.e.*, something unprecedented.** Israel was cautioned not to make the past the measure of the future (cf. vers. 18, 19). They were often exhorted to seek help and consolation in remembering their past; but this is a caution against a way of looking at the past which works injury—against a brooding on it that spoils the future. Self-consciousness comes with increasing years; we are apt to exclaim, "The thing which hath been is that which shall be;" "The child is father of the man," points to the conclusion of a wide induction. Philosophy tells us that this unreadiness to believe that the future can be better than the past is but a proof of growing wisdom; and we are often inclined to say, "our theories of the Christian life have always been far in advance of our attainments; but shortcomings have brought down our expectations." It is one of the severest penalties of unfaithfulness, that hope for the future is slain.

Often men are not troubled much about the loss of hope, but even these know what it is to have a dark void where there should be a light shining more and more.

One of the hardest tasks of the Hebrew prophets was that of renewing in the people the impulses of hope; and so this representative messenger of God proclaims, "Remember not the former things," old things *may* pass away, all things *may* become new.

II. This new thing is compared with the opening of a path in the wilderness, and the supply of rivers in the desert. Before each one there is a pathless wilderness, beset by difficulties and perils; but even there God will make a way for His people, and sustain their life. Preparation and guidance, difficulty, peril, privation! These are thoughts which associate themselves with the desert and the wilderness. For every Christian, God is preparing a way through unknown experiences. Of each man it may be said—

> "He was the first that ever burst
> Into that silent sea."

But God prepares the way; He preserves the traveller; He connects the present, the future, and the past. Each day shall be, in some respects, different from all past days; and when the heart turns faint at new demands made upon it, He breathes new life into it with the promise, "Behold, I will do a new thing!" The voice of apprehension cries, "How shall freshness and vigour be maintained within me?" God says, "I will supply rivers in the desert;" not simply sufficiency, but abundance. To-morrow may be a barren prospect; but God is with us; we are near to the Fountain of Life. We often speak of our lack of spiritual life and vigour as though it were a perplexing problem. Is it so, when we do not, will not, drink? There is a "law of the life" of the spirit as well as of the body. Our hearts are like seeds wrapped round so that moisture and air are excluded; such seeds may be planted, but they will not grow. Nor will our hearts wrapped round by prayerlessness, selfishness, indolence, and forgetfulness. Take away these wrappings, lay them aside for ever!

Note further, that this Divine promise pledges God to supply that which is a natural source of verdure, gladness, beauty. This is only one of many instances, in which we are taught that God's will is not only to preserve, but also to *adorn* our life (ch. xxxv. 1). The young should surely listen to this voice. For them all life is emphatically new; their experiences shall not, indeed, be unparalleled in the history of men, but to them they shall be *a new thing from God.* Christ declares Himself to be the Giver of "living water;" life, and light, and beauty go before Him; He speaks the word which cannot fail: "Behold, I make all things new!"—*Thomas Stephenson: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. v. pp. 209–210.

God's People.

xliii. 21. *This people I have formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise.*

Introduction. (α)

I. It is the prerogative of God alone to form the soul of man anew, both for His service here, and enjoyment hereafter. 1. *The subjects of his workmanship:* sinners of Adam's family. Poor material, degraded by sin; but power belongeth unto God, and nothing is too hard for Him to do. He can humble the most stubborn heart, &c. Great comfort in this truth for ourselves individually. 2. *The work itself*, creating them in Christ Jesus unto good works; renewing them in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after the image of Him who created them. This work will be completed in each of His people. (β) Cheerfully acquiesce in any discipline through which He may be pleased to put you for this

purpose (H. E. I. 113–115, 157, 158, 3696–3703).

II. In this act of special sovereign grace He has always respect unto Himself; that is, to the display and manifestation of His own glory as the end. The Scriptures invariably teach us to reflect upon God as having made all things for Himself; a lower motive than this He never acted from. He forms this people for the manifestation of the astonishing and unsearchable riches,—1. Of His *grace*. How glorious is the grace manifested in the conquest and captivation of sinners, in the pardon of sin, in the sanctification of the soul, and in the support, supplies, and consolations of the people of God. Instance: (1 Tim. i. 12–15).

2. Of His *power*. Manifest in penetrating a heart hard as adamant; in enthroning grace in the very heart where sin has reigned; in preserving it in spite of all opposition (H. E. I. 2365–2376).

3. Of His *wisdom*. Manifest in fixing upon the means of bringing sinners to Christ, ordering all things relative to their course, overruling all things for their good, and raising them from the depths of human misery to the summit of heaven's honours.

III. From this, as from all His other works, He will eventually derive a glorious revenue of praise: "They shall show forth my praise." 1. It is not only the duty, but the desire of that people whom God forms for Himself to praise Him in the present life (1 Pet. ii. 9). 2. It will be their happy disposition and delightful employ eternally to give unto Him the honour due on that account.—*George Lambert: Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 274–293.

(α) In ancient history we read of a prince, who, from the summit of his palace beholding the metropolis of his extensive empire, exulted thus, "This is Babylon the great—Babylon, which I have built for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty." He beheld the rising domes, the solemn temples, the numberless palaces of his lords; his heart bounded at the prospect, and his soul inflated with pride. Small cause, however, to be proud, had he recollected that these buildings were inhabited by a nation of slaves, and these temples filled with superstition and idolatry. In the sentence just read you have a far more noble potentate, even the King of kings Himself, reflecting upon the work of His hands, and rejoicing in the review of it. Beholding the triumphs of His grace, the accomplishment of His sacred purposes, and the wonders of His power, He expresses His complete satisfaction. His labour is not found in vain, His exertions are crowned with the designed success, and the production exactly corresponds with the plan laid down. With pleasure He reviews His workmanship, and already anticipates that chorus of praise which will perpetuate the honour of His name through eternal ages.—*Lambert.*

(β) When it is said, "This people *have* I formed for myself," it is not to be understood as though the work were already completely accomplished. That will not be the case till all the ransomed of the Lord shall be brought safe to the heavenly Zion. God is here represented as seeing the things which are not as though they were, and as beholding the end from the beginning. With Him to will and to do, to purpose and to perform, are so closely, so infallibly connected, as in effect to be the same.—*Lambert.*

The text refers to the literal house of Israel. The Church of Christ now enjoy the appellation of "the people of God." Whether Jews or Gentiles, to them the text will apply.

I. THE PEOPLE REFERRED TO. The people of God. Sometimes called saints, &c.

1. They are a *saved* people. Not only redeemed, but saved. Christ is the "Saviour of all men, but especially," &c. St. Paul says, By grace are ye saved, &c. Not shall be, &c., but are (Eph. ii. 8; Titus iii. 5; 1 Cor. i. 18). They have felt the efficacy of divine grace; have been justified, &c. Saved from sin to righteousness; from darkness, &c.

2. They are a *peculiar* people. So they are described by the apostle (Titus ii. 14; 1 Pet. ii. 9). Not like others. They are not of the world, &c. Hence their manners and customs, their spirit and temper, their conduct and pursuits, are all peculiar to themselves. It must be so, it ought to be so. The opposite would be evil, &c.

3. They are a *distinct* people. There are peculiar people in the world, yet

they are of the world. But His people are distinct and separate. A people *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Crucified to the world, &c. (H. E. I. 5026–5032).

II. THE FORMATION SPECIFIED.

1. The *nature* of this formation. Formed into a "people." God does not intend believers to be isolated beings. He designed they should be collected—united—a people. Hence they are likened to a family, &c. Only in this way they can exercise their graces, &c., exhibit Christianity in its social influences, and extend it in the world. Beautifully likened to the members of the human body (1 Cor. xii. 14, 20).

2. The *Author* of this formation. It is divine—it is of God. The Church is God's husbandry, God's building. He gives the same spirit to all, but a diversity of operations, that each may add to the comfort and prosperity of the whole. Hence the term, "the Church of God." God's collecting—calling—keeping—saving, &c.

III. THE END CONTEMPLATED IN THIS FORMATION. "For myself," &c. He made all things for Himself—the Church for Himself. It is called His rest, His dwelling, His delight; and He designs that they "should show forth," &c. They do this by—1. Exhibiting the effects of His gracious operations. 2. Labouring to diffuse His glory. For this they live, and act, and pray. 3. Resignation to the divine appointments. Thus Job, the apostles, and first Christians, &c.

CONCLUSION.—Of what people are you personally a part? Let the people of God think of their high vocation, &c.—*Preachers' Magazine*, 1839.

HOPE FOR THE PENITENT.

xliii. 24–26. *Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, &c.*

These words are addressed to penitent sinners, mourning before God on account of their transgressions. I joy to bring to them this message of mercy and peace. Listen, then, O mourners in Zion,

I. TO A DECLARATION OF YOUR SINS AND DESERTS.

With what a heavy charge does my text begin! Yet, you know it is true. Not only sinners by nature, you have grieved and wearied God by your actual transgressions. What evil tempers, words, actions, sins of omission and of commission, you have to confess before God! How often did you offend Him even in His sanctuary! The charges His word brought against you, you met by unbelief, itself the sin of sins; but now you feel that you are indeed guilty before God. But let not a sight and sense of your guilt discourage your souls; but let it make Christ and His salvation the more welcome. Listen,

II. TO THE PROCLAMATION OF A FREE AND FULL FORGIVENESS (ver. 25).

There is nothing but encouragement in these gracious words; they abound with blessings; they make known

"Mercy for all, immense and free."

The Promiser, the promise itself, its kind application, and the basis on which it rests, open to us four sources of the most abundant joy and consolation.

1. *The Author of the promise.* "I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions." Mourning sinners, do you know that voice? It is the voice of the Lord (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7). He does not commission a multitude of the heavenly host to carry glad tidings of great joy to all who mourn over their trangressions; neither does He merely command the minister of His word to speak comfortably unto them; but from His lofty throne He Himself speaks unto their hearts!

2. Hence the promise in the text is expressed in the most cheering language (ver. 25). It is not uncommon for the Scriptures to represent sins as debts, an account of which is preserved

in the book of the creditor. When the debt is paid, the sum is crossed over, to intimate that the creditor's demands are satisfied, and that the debtor is known in that character no longer. But here, to point out the free and full manner in which God bestows pardon, the significant expression "blotteth out" is used, the debt is not merely crossed but obliterated; so that the record can be read no more. God forgives large debts as well as small (Luke vii. 40–42). Nor will He make any demand of thy debt at any future time; He will remember thy sins no more.

3. His promise applies to the man who feels most that he deserves no mercy from God. Thou mourner in Zion, thy self-despair makes it evident that "thou art not far from the kingdom of God." No longer despair; "be not faithless, but believing" (H. E. I. 2332–2337).

4. The basis on which this promise rests may further assure us of the certainty of its fulfilment. God forgives the guilty for His own sake, and not for the sake of their deservings (ver. 25; ch. xlviii. 9–11; Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 25, 26, 31, 32). God pardons the believing penitent—

(1) *For His mercy's sake.* It is the property of the eternal Jehovah "always to have mercy," but every act of free unmerited grace in justifying the ungodly furnishes a new *display* of His glory. God is concerned for His own honour; He, therefore, will save all who come to Him through His Son Jesus Christ. Will God, "who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, that with Him He might freely give us all things," withhold from thee that pardon which, at His feet, thou art groaning to obtain? If thou wert to perish while coming to God in the way He Himself hath appointed, what a triumph it would afford to all the powers of darkness!

(2) *For His justice's sake* (Rom. iii. 23–26). On the ground of the all-sufficient atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is for the honour of the justice of God to pardon the guilty the moment he confesses his sins, and truly believes upon the righteous Saviour.

(3) *For His truth's sake* (Ezek. xxxiii. 11; Isa. lv. 7). God will as certainly perform all His promises as His threatenings.

As the promise rests on a foundation that cannot be shaken, we ought with confidence and joy to receive it.

III. TO THE INVITATION URGING YOU TO ACCEPT THE PROFFERED MERCY (ver. 26).

These glorious words invite all the contrite in heart into the very presence of God, there to prefer their requests, assured that He will "fulfil all their petitions." In pressing these petitions they have a threefold duty to perform:—

1. *To state the grounds on which they expect an answer:* "Put Me in remembrance." Thus He speaks in compassion to our infirmities, and to encourage us to "come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy." Put Him in remembrance—(1) Of Gethsemane and the cross. (2) Of His promises. The best prayers penitent sinners can use are the promises of God turned into petitions. (3) Of His wonted compassion to sinners.

2. *To urge in humble confidence their requests:* "Let us plead together." (Cf. Job xxiii. 1–7.) Let the pleading begin on your part; and let this be your encouragment, that the Holy Spirit "will help your infirmities." All your arguments must be such as proceed from a full and unqualified admission of your own guilt, a ready acknowledgment of past sinfulness, of your present unworthiness, and of your utter helplessness. Confession of sin is one of the most powerful pleas you can use! But, saith the Redeemer, "Let us plead *together*." Listen, therefore, to His pleadings with you. Renouncing your own righteousness, you plead His merits; He also pleads those merits as a reason why you should no longer doubt, but take Him as the Lord in whom you have righteousness and strength. He will remind

you of His promises; and if there be any upbraiding at all on His part, it will be nothing more than is contained in these Scriptures (John xvi. 24. xx. 27).

3. *To claim in strong faith the promised blessing:* "Declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." Nothing is wanting to pardon, but their own declaration! "What must I declare?" Declare with all thine heart, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe that He is my Saviour, my Lord, and my God. I take Him for my wisdom, my righteousness, my sanctification, my redemption."

> "Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
> Which at the mercy-seat of God
> For ever doth for sinners plead,
> For me, even for *my* soul, was shed."

—*W. J. Shrewsbury: Sermons*, pp. 370–400.

Forgiveness of Sin.

xliii. 25. *I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

"Thy sins." What is sin? We must go the Word of God for a correct reply; for although at first the divine law was written on the human heart, yet now depravity has well nigh effaced that writing, and sin itself has made the conscience vile. Neither can we truly learn what sin is by comparing ourselves with our fellow-men, for they are sinners as we are. In God's Word alone can we clearly perceive what sin is, as being in its essence a violation of law, and contempt of the divine Lawgiver (H. E. I. 4478-4480). But even in this aspect its full enormity does not come into view. We must consider what God is, and what we owe to Him, and then it will appear that our iniquity is the forthputting of our strength against Him from whom our strength has been derived, and to whom we owe our all.

Observe, our iniquities are here called ours. "*Thy* sins," "*thy* transgressions." We often boast of our possessions, but there is nothing else ours as sin is ours. In the sense of absolute possession, sins are the only things we have. We are their authors, their creators; and if we repent not, throughout eternity they will be vultures which will gnaw our hearts, the undying worm, and the unquenchable fire to which we shall be constantly exposed.

Can no one sever the connection between me and my sin? Must I perish thus? The text is God's gracious answer to that anxious question.

I. The blessing here promised.

1. *Forgiveness.* "I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions." The language is figurative, and may refer either to the blotting out of a dark cloud from the heavens, until there shall not be a single speck upon the blue expanse; or to the blotting out of a sentence, when the criminal is pardoned. Forgiveness is the setting free of a guilty man from liability to the punishment which his crimes have merited. Of this pardon two characteristics are prominent in the phraseology of the text. (1.) Its fulness. It is a *blotting out.* He redeems Israel from *all* his iniquities. (2.) It is a present blessing. The words imply that God does so even now. Soon as the sinner believes, he is forgiven.

2. "*I will not remember thy sins.*" In a strict sense I am not sure that God can be said to remember or to forget anything. The expression of my text must not be taken in its strictest literality; it is used in accommodation to our finite minds, as the best means of telling us that our former sins will not, after we are pardoned, be any, even the slightest barrier, on God's side at least, to our intercourse with Him. They are as good as forgotten; we may therefore rise to friendship with God, undimmed by anything which, coming from Him, could painfully remind us that we had formerly been His enemies.

II. The source from which this blessing flows.

"I, even I," &c. It is thus a pardon from God. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" There can be no peace enjoyed by any one until he knows that it is God who has forgiven him. When a criminal has been condemned to death, the fact that he is pitied and forgiven by the friends of him whom he has murdered will not save his life, for he has sinned not merely against them, but against the law, and if the sovereign do not issue pardon, he must endure the penalty. And so I have sinned against God; and I can rest in nothing short of absolution pronounced by Him. If it be a merely human pardon on which I rest, the first thought of God will be sufficient to bring back my disquietude and fear; but if it be God's forgiveness, I may rest on that for ever. If I certainly know that He has justified, I may sound out the daring defiance, and challenge the universe for a reply, "Who is he that condemneth?" If man pardon, God may still condemn; but if God forgive, then there is no power that can reverse His deed, and He Himself will never revoke it.

III. THE GROUND ON WHICH THIS BLESSING IS BESTOWED.

"For mine own sake." The words imply, 1. *That God does not forgive sin on the ground of anything in the sinner, or done by him.* It is not written, for thy tears' sake, or for thy good deeds' sake, or for thy repentance' sake, but "for mine own sake." When the tribes of Israel were about to enter Canaan, it was over and over again declared that God gave them not that good land to possess it for their own sake, &c. (Deut. ix. 4–6). So with the blessings of the new covenant, "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord" (Ezek. xxxvi. 32). God will not, because He cannot, forgive you on the ground of your own worthiness, or for your own sake.

2. *That God forgives sin only on such a ground as glorifies Himself.* He cannot forgive sin in every way, or on every ground. He cannot do it simply for His mercy's sake, for He is just as well as merciful; and both of these attributes must be radiant with glory, in His method of forgiveness. Hence it is only "for His own sake"—that is, through the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ—that this blessing is bestowed: for only thus is the whole glory secured to Himself. If God were to forgive sin without any satisfaction to His justice, or any vindication of His law, His doing so would dishonour His character, and sap the foundations of His moral government He must be seen to be a "just God as well as "a Saviour:" and in the very matter of justifying the ungodly, His justice must be clearly manifested (H. E. I. 376).

> "In that salvation wrought by Thee,
> Thy glory is made great."

For here His justice is satisfied, His law magnified, His name honoured.

IV. THE EVIDENT DELIGHT WHICH GOD HAS IN GRANTING THIS BLESSING.

"I, *even* I, am He." He dwells on it, and specially on the fact of its coming from Him, to show that it is not only His own proper prerogative, but His especial delight, to forgive sin for His own sake. He delighteth in mercy, and the depth of that delight is nowhere seen so clearly as in the Cross through which He seeks to enjoy it. He is not the austere Master that many picture Him to be: He is a loving Father, if men would only let Him love them; and there is nothing now in which He so rejoices as in the bestowment of forgiveness on His believing people. Some of us can tell how blessed it is to receive this pardon; but who can conceive how much greater is the blessedness of Him who gives it! (H. E. I. 2328.) Sinner, the highest happiness thou canst give to God will be by accepting this gracious blessing.

V. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE TO WHOM THIS DECLARATION IS HERE MADE.

Read verses 22–24. After this, as an old commentator has said, "one would think it should follow—I, even I, am He that will destroy thee and burden myself no longer with care about thee:" but no; where sin has

abounded, grace does much more abound; where wrath is most deserved, mercy is most graciously expressed. If forgiveness has been offered to sinners such as these, who had wearied God with their iniquities, is there any reason why it should not be to us? We may have been very aggravated transgressors, but we can hardly be worse than they were. Yet even if we are, we may take these words as addressed to us. It makes no matter who or what we are, yet with the Lord there is mercy for us, and with Him there is plenteous redemption.

But how, you say, am I to take it? I answer in the words of the prophet, "Let the wicked forsake His way," &c. You are to take it by repentance and faith. Repentance looses your hold from sin, faith fixes it upon Jesus Christ.—*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*: "*Life Truths*," pp. 21–37.

That article in the creed, "*I believe in the forgiveness of sin*," is too little thought of. Men flippantly declare that they believe in it when they are not conscious of any great sin of their own, but when his transgression is made apparent to a man, and his iniquity comes home to him, it is quite another matter. His first instinct is to fear that his sins are altogether unpardonable. If he does not state his unbelief in so many words, yet in the secret of his soul that dreadful conviction takes hold upon him and darkens every window of hope. He looks to the law of God, and while he looks in that direction he will certainly conclude that there is no pardon, for the law knows nothing of forgiveness. Within the awakened man there is the memory of his past offences, and on account of these his conscience passes judgment upon his soul, and condemns it as even the law doth. Many natural impressions and instincts assist and increase the clamours of conscience; for the man knows within himself, as the result of observation and experience, that sin must bring its own punishment. He perceives that it is a knife which cuts the hand of him that handles it, a sword that kills the man who fights therewith. He feels that he cannot himself readily pass by offences committed by his fellow-men, and so he concludes that the Lord cannot willingly forgive. That part of the hardness of his heart goes to deepen the conviction that God will not pass by his transgression; and he is therefore terribly dismayed and hopeless of mercy. The convinced sinner is able to believe that mercy may be shown to others; but as for himself he signs his own death-warrant, and labours under the full persuasion that the acts of God's mercy can never extend *to him*. No stocks can hold a man so fast as his own guilty fears.

With the desponding I shall try to deal.

I. THERE IS FORGIVENESS.

1. *This appears in the treatment of sinners by God, inasmuch as He spares their forfeited lives.* When our first parents had transgressed, they came at once under desert of penalty. The Lord visited the garden and convinced the offenders of their transgression; but instead of there and then casting them for ever away, He talked to them of a certain seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head. Would the Lord thus have spared them, if He had not meant to show mercy? If God had no pardons, would He not long ago have cut us down? God waiteth long, because He willeth not the death of any, but that they turn to Him and live.

2. *Why did God institute the ceremonial law, if there were no ways of pardoning transgression?* Why the sacrificial shedding of blood, if God did not intend to blot out sin? Does not a type imply the existence of that which is typified? The evident design of the whole Mosaic economy was to reveal to man the existence of mercy in the heart of God, and the effectual operation of that mercy in washing away sin.

3. *If there is no forgiveness of sin, why has the Lord given to sinful men exhortations to repent?*

4. *There must be pardons in the hand*

of God, or why the institution of religious worship among us to this day? Why are we allowed to pray, if we cannot be forgiven? Why are we allowed to sing the praises of God? Does God expect the condemned to praise Him? Will He shut us up in the prison-house for certain death, and yet expect us to chant hallelujahs to His praise?

5. *Why did Christ institute the Christian ministry, and send forth His servants to proclaim His gospel?* What is the gospel but a declaration that Christ is exalted on high to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins? Why are we so earnestly commanded to preach this gospel to every creature, if the creature hearing it and believing it must, nevertheless, still lie under his sin?

6. *Why are we taught in that blessed model of prayer which our Saviour has left us, to say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"?* It is evident that God means us to give a true absolution to all who have offended us. He does not intend that we should play at forgiveness, but should really forgive all those who have done evil towards us in any way. Yes; but then He has linked with that forgiveness our prayer for mercy, teaching us to ask that He would forgive us as we forgive them. If, then, our forgiveness is real, so is His. A star of hope shines upon the sinner from the Lord's Prayer in that particular petition.

7. *God has actually forgiven multitudes of sinners.* We have read in Holy Scripture of men who walked with God and had this testimony, that they pleased God; but they could not have pleased Him if their sins still provoked Him to wrath; therefore He must have put their sins away. But I need not talk of past ages; many sitting among you this day will tell you that they enjoy a clear sense of forgiven sin.

II. THIS FORGIVENESS IS TANTAMOUNT TO FORGETTING SIN.

The Lord does not exercise memory as you and I do. We recall the past, but He has no past; all things are present with Him. God sees everything at once by an intuitive perception: the past, the present, the future are before Him at a glance. We may not speak, except after the manner of men, of the Lord God as having memory; and yet how blessed it is that He should Himself use the speech which is current among ourselves, and represent Himself after the manner of a man, and then say, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more for ever." He wishes us to know that His pardon is so true and deep that it amounts to an absolute oblivion, a total forgetting of all the wrong-doing of the pardoned ones.

You know what we do when we exercise memory. 1. To speak popularly, a man lays up a thing in his mind; but when sin is forgiven *it is not laid up in God's mind.* We make a kind of store-room of our memory, and there things are preserved, like fruits in autumn, stored up to be used by and by (Luke ii. 19). The Lord will not do this with our sins. He will not store them in His archives; He will not give them house-room. As for the ungodly, their sins are written with an iron pen, and the measure of their iniquity is daily filling, till it be poured out upon their own head; their sins have gone before them to the judgment-seat, and are crying aloud for vengeance. As for God's people, their case is otherwise; the Lord imputeth not their iniquities to them, and does not treasure them up against a day of wrath. Of course the Lord remembers their evil-doings in the sense that He cannot forget anything; but judicially, as a judge, He forgets the transgressions of the pardoned ones. They are not before Him in court, and come not under His official ken.

2. In remembering, men also consider and meditate on things; but *the Lord will not think over the sins of His people.* I have known persons brood over an offence, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings. The wrong grows worse as they think it over. They carefully observe the offence

from different points of view, and whereas they were indignant at first, they nurse their wrath and make it so warm that it turns to fury. At first, they would have been satisfied with an apology; but when they have brooded over the injustice, it seems so atrocious that they demand vengeance on the offender. The merciful Lord doth not so to those who repent. No; for He saith, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

3. Sometimes you have almost forgotten a thing, and it is quite gone out of your mind; but an event happens which recalls it so vividly, that it seems as if it were perpetrated but yesterday. *God will not recall the sin of the pardoned.* The transgressions of His people are dead and buried, and they shall never have a resurrection: "I will not remember their sins."

4. This not remembering means that God will *never seek any further atonement.* Under the old law, there was remembrance of sins made every year on the day of atonement; but now the blessed One hath entered once for all within the veil, and hath put away sin for ever by the sacrifice of Himself, so that there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. The Lord will never seek another expiatory offering. The sufferings of Jesus are so all-sufficient that no believer shall be made to suffer penalty for his unrighteousness.

5. When it is said that God forgets our sins, it signifies that *He will never punish us for them.* How can He, when He has forgotten them? Next, that *He will never upbraid us with them,*—"He giveth liberally and upbraideth not." How can He upbraid us with what He has forgotten? He will not even lay them to our charge (Ezek. xviii. 22; Rom. viii. 33, 34).

6. When the Lord says, "I will not remember their sins," what does it mean but this—that *He will not treat us any the less generously on account of our having been great sinners?* Look how the Lord takes some of the biggest sinners and uses them for His glory. When I think of Peter standing up on the Day of Pentecost, and three thousand being converted under his first sermon, I think no more of Peter's failure and the cock-crowing. I can see that the Lord has forgotten his threefold denial, and placed him in the front to be a soul-winner. But the Lord Jesus not only uses His people, He honours them greatly. What honours He put upon the apostles, those men that forsook Him and fled in the hour of His passion! God has taken some here present, and has given them commission and ability to bring blood-bought souls to Himself. Is not this the sign of perfect forgiveness? Blessing He blesses us; yea, and makes us blessings. We shall have grace on earth, and glory in heaven. Surely all this proves that He has altogether blotted out our sins, and has determined to treat us as if we had been perfectly innocent.

III. FORGIVENESS IS TO BE HAD.

How? Through the atoning blood! Come for it in God's appointed way. "Repent;" that is, be sorry for your sin; change your mind about it and hate it, though once you loved it. Then confess it, for He saith, "only acknowledge thine iniquity." Chief of all, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," and that saving includes an act of amnesty and oblivion as to all your sinful thoughts, and words, and acts. Hast thou done this? Then thou art forgiven! Never forget thy sin, nor the mercy which has forgiven it. Always repent and always praise the Lord. Honour the forgetfulness of God in not remembering thy faults, and henceforth do thou tell this blessed news to every one thou seest—there is forgiveness, such forgiveness as was never heard of until God Himself revealed it by saying of His people, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more".—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1685.

It is in standing well with God that the chief good of man consists. On this everything depends, both for

time and eternity. As man is His creature, *His child*, there can be in the heart of God no other feeling towards him in this character than good-will and complacency. But one thing there is that has come between us and Him—sin, a thing that He cannot but hate; the one thing in all the universe against which His displeasure is declared. Yet it has proved the occasion of bringing out His love into fuller manifestation. He has been pleased to proclaim a free pardon, altogether irrespective of the nature and extent of our sins, and with no other condition attached to it than that we receive it as the gift of His grace. How great a blessing! The pledge of every other blessing that can come upon the soul. Needed by every one of us (H. E. I. 2329, 2330). Needed all through life, in death, and beyond death!

I. God undertakes to pardon sin for His own sake. It is against Him that we have sinned, and consequently it is only He that can forgive us. There is but one thing that can give hope to the guilty soul, and that is an assurance from God Himself that He will deal with it in mercy, and not remember it against us. Such an assurance He has given us; indeed it may be said to be the chief purpose of Revelation to convey this message of peace to our sin-ruined world, and commend it to our acceptance (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7; Isa. i. 18; Ps. lxxxvi. 5, &c.)

But it is not in love alone, but in righteousness as well that sin is forgiven. He has also made known to us the special provision which has been made for this purpose. The Son of God appears in this world in our nature, bears the burden of our sin, suffers and dies in homage to the law of righteousness, and rises from the dead as a sign that nothing more can be demanded either at His hands or at the hands of those whose representative He is (Rom. iv. 25; 1 Pet. iii. 18; 2 Cor. v. 21). It is as the All-just, then, and not only as the All-merciful,—in His full character as the Righteous Father,—that God saves the soul from sin. This meets the demands of our moral nature. It is a righteous pardon that is conveyed in the Gospel, and as such it is proof against conscience, and law, and judgment, and all the terrors which it is in their power to summon against us.

Yet we must never cease to think of mercy as the grand source of salvation. Let no one suppose that the work of Christ was necessary in order to incline God to mercy (see p. 92, and H. E. I. 390). On the contrary, it was in His mercy that the plan of grace took its rise (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 10). It is "for His own sake" that He pardons and saves,—not on the ground of anything lying outside His own nature, but on the ground of that love, so full and changeless, that it has been in His heart from of old, even from everlasting. And if it is "for His own sake," in this high sense, how much more may we say that it is not by reason of anything in man that He pardons sin?

II. Let us now consider pardon as a thing which every one may look upon as put in his own power. It is the guilty that are in need of pardon; it is to them that it is offered; and as all men are guilty in the sight of God, the offer is intended to be co-extensive with the whole human family. (α) This being so, with what shadow of reason can any one stand afar off, as if the message of peace were not intended for him?

The offer of pardon is sometimes presented in a manner still more pointed and individualising. The individual is singled out from the mass, and has the offer made to him in as direct and personal a manner as if it were made to none beside him.

The offer applies to every one just in the state in which it finds him. Yet there are few things men are more slow to believe, than that a free and unconditional pardon is put in their own power.

"How can pardon have any reference to us, so long as our hearts are hard, cold, and impenitent, as we know them to be!" There are dis-

cases to which the body is liable of a very formidable kind, and which yet are attended with so little pain as to give the patient no alarm of his danger. But when the physician assures him of his real condition, and offers to cure him, would his insensibility to the disease be any good reason for saying that the remedy prescribed to him could have no application to his case? And so as to the sinner. This very want of feeling is itself a part of our sin; and therefore, to say that we dare not think of pardon until we get rid of it, is to say either that it is a sin which the mercy of God does not reach, or that it must be overcome in some way or other before it can be forgiven. But "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;" and this includes blindness, coldness, impenitence, not less than sin of any other kind, so that however insensate a man may be, he has full pardon put in his power. (β) It is not merely to the humble and contrite that pardon is proclaimed, but to man simply as a sinner, with all his impenitence and all his insensibility (H. E. I. 942).

III. The manner in which we close with the offer of pardon. As the offer is made to us in the free and unqualified form in which we have just described it, a simple acceptance of it is all that can be necessary. But what are we to understand by the acceptance of a gift of this nature? Faith is the only power by which we can deal with it. When some one whom you have offended tells you that he forgives you, all you have to do is to satisfy yourself that he is sincere in what he says, and trust in his honour to make it good; and at once the difference is at an end, and you have no more any uneasiness on the subject. In like manner, an offer of pardon is made to you by God: He cannot be insincere in making it. He can neither repent of it, nor prove unable to do as He has said. Rest in all this as true, trust in God for His own blessing, and in this state of mind you close with His great offer, and your sin is no more remembered against you (H. E. I. 1962).

IV. The acceptance of pardon will lead to two things, — Comfort and Holiness. 1. If we could realise all that is implied in it,—how deep the death from which we are saved, and how high and blessed the life which begins to open up to us; and could we take it home to ourselves in all its fulness, our consolation would be unspeakable (H. E. I. 306, 307). The man who has no belief that his sins are forgiven can have no comfort in the thought of God or eternity. But just in the degree in which you can trust in God for the pardon of which He has been pleased to assure you, you will have *peace*. To you He will be a Friend and a Father. There is *joy* also in the sense of pardon. Those who know what it is to be in distress of soul, as if the terrors of the Lord had been let loose upon them, and the pains of hell had taken hold upon them, and who pass from this into the peace of God, will be filled with gladness, and for a time perhaps with ecstasy. (γ)

2. The other result that may be expected to flow from an acceptance of the remission of sin is *Holiness*. No sooner do we receive the grace of reconciliation, than we enter into new relations, and begin to move in a new sphere: the whole of our spiritual surroundings are changed: "old things are passed away, and all things are become new." The consequence of this will be a new tendency of thought and action. It is not in the spirit of a hireling, not for wages that we serve, but in love to one who loves us with an everlasting love, and at whose hands we receive infinitely more as a free gift than anything we could have ever earned for ourselves. Having been forgiven much, we love much. Here is the great spring of holiness,—love to the Holy One, and this blending with a regard for His holy will, and this, again, being inseparable from a feeling of active delight in His holy law.—*George Hutchison, D.D.: Sermons*, pp. 244–266

(α) As far as the proclamation of mercy is concerned, no one is excepted of any class or character, so that every one is warranted to take it to himself. Where there is no express exclusion, all must be held to be included. A whole province, let us suppose, has risen up in rebellion against its sovereign, and he might justly take punishment on all the inhabitants. Instead of this, however, he proclaims a free pardon through all its borders, among all ranks and classes of the people, whether leaders or followers in the revolt, whether more or less criminal, without exception or qualification of any kind. Such a proclamation would take in every individual in the land, and would at once put an end to fear and inspire universal confidence. For none could pretend, with any show of reason, that the king's pardon was not meant for him, and that he had no warrant for embracing it. Now this is an exact representation of how the matter stands between the King of heaven and the inhabitants of this guilty world. As all are involved in the same sin, the same pardon is proclaimed to all.—*Hutchison.*

(β) As to overcoming our insensibility or any other sin, as a prerequisite for pardon, that is a thing which it is not in any man to achieve. But suppose it were possible, and that it were made one of the conditions on which sin is forgiven, then pardon would come to be a kind of compromise between God and man—each going so far to meet the other—God doing so much in mercy, and man being expected to do the rest in the way of a meritorious movement towards God. Nor is this objection met even if we strike out the element of merit, and ascribe the movement to the grace of the Spirit; for this would be to reverse the Divine order of the two grand elements of salvation, as if holiness could come before pardon, and as if pardon were not the very first step in the way of life.—*Hutchison.*

(γ) But let no one reckon on the permanency of such emotions, nor despair when they sink down into a calmer state of mind, as if the mercy and faithfulness of the Most High were dependent on the variable flow of human feelings. As the man that but an hour before was counting the few swift days that seemed to lie between him and his doom, goes along the streets on his way from prison pardoned and free, we can suppose him to be so glad at heart that the very din and tumult of the busy crowds, as they hurry to and fro, are as music to his ear; and when he goes out into the fields and woods, he sees a beauty in the leaf and in the flower, and hears a melody in the song of the birds, such as he had never known before. But can it be supposed that rapture like this will continue for any length of time? And when it has given place to a calmer state of feeling, are we to say there is no comfort remaining? Emotion may and must subside, but there is a happiness bound up with a sense of safety that is sure to survive. And so with the man whose sins are forgiven, and who clings to this conviction in every variety of experience. Your hearts at times may be as dry as dust, yet doubt not even then that you are safe,—as clear of guilt in the eye of God, and as radiant in the white robes of righteousness, as at other times when the tide of feeling is at the fullest.—*Hutchison* (see also H. E. I. 2073, 2074).

This is a promise of forgiveness Every criminal is liable to punishment, and fears it. Does not the child desire forgiveness when he has transgressed his father's command? This promise is made to sinners. In promising or bestowing forgiveness, God does not exterminate sin. The accusation against the Jewish people is drawn out in verses 22–24. Sin is universal. There are degrees of heinousness. Some have gone greater lengths than others, and sinned against greater light. There is more or less acknowledgment of sinfulness in all. Some are deeply convinced and awakened to concern. They are conscious of the alienation from God and exposure to wrath.

The Gospel proclaims forgiveness. It is a Gospel of mercy.

I. The text represents the Gospel forgiveness as Divine. "I, even I, am He." It rested with Himself exclusively to determine whether mercy should be exercised; and if so, in what way. And it is His exclusive prerogative to exercise the mercy, if it is exercised at all. "Who can forgive sins, but God only?" No priest possesses this power. His words of absolution are ineffective, excepting as they declare God's readiness to forgive. "But did not Jesus give this power to the Apostles?" (John xx. 23). If He did, it would not follow that the power descended to any subsequent minister of Christ. The Apostles had no successors. But there is no instance recorded of their ever exercising this power. It is fair to infer that they did not possess it. The power conferred was simply ministerial. Power to declare the way of salvation, the forgiveness of sins. Possessed by every preacher

And by every Christian (Rev. xxii. 17).

He who alone can forgive does forgive. He has chosen to provide mercy. The text affirms it. The Gospel affirms it. In this capacity He will be known to men. He is the sin-pardoning God. Encouraging to those who desire forgiveness.

II. The text represents the Gospel forgiveness as Gracious. "For mine own sake." He must glorify Himself. The display of the Divine glory is intimately associated with and essential to His moral government. The mercy of the Gospel displays—

1. *His love.* Human sin is the fearful problem of the ages. But it gave occasion for the manifestation of an attribute which without it could not have been known. Divine love, in the exercise of forgiveness, becomes possible by sin. The truth that God is love stands forth more distinctly.

2. *His righteousness.* Seen in the method and grounds of forgiveness. What a father may do in the privacy of his family in relation to offences, is different from what a magistrate may do in his public capacity. The latter is bound to maintain the law without deviation. He is the representative of justice. In this capacity the Divine wisdom and righteousness have combined with love in providing mercy, after satisfying the demands of justice. Christ has made the satisfaction (H. E. I. 376).

3. *His faithfulness.* He revealed His saving purpose to the Jews. He has revealed His grace in Christ. His honour is bound to the pardon of all that accept the proclamation by believing in Jesus.

In providing mercy and exercising forgiveness He acts according to His own nature as well as for the sinner's advantage. And the view of the Divine character which is presented by the Gospel is more calculated to secure honour, and trust, and love, and obedience than any other.

III. The text represents the Gospel forgiveness as Complete. "That blotteth out thy transgressions; and will not remember thy sins." Here is the assurance of a true, because a complete forgiveness. There is a sense in which it is impossible for sin to be blotted out. Many of its effects must remain on ourselves and on others. Even suffering through sin after it is forgiven. The drunkard and the impure may have repented and found forgiveness in Christ, and yet the ruin of their health and affairs may not be repaired. Nothing can undo the past. Neither can God literally forget sin. His Omniscience retains everything for ever. Men say they may forgive, but cannot forget. They often mean something different from what He means. He blots out sin, when the sinner repairs to the Cross, as the record of a debt is blotted from the book; so that the debtor is treated as if he did not owe it. He will not remember sin against the sinner. It is as if the recipient of a past injury dismisses all feeling from his mind, and treats the offender as if he had not sinned. He reconciles him to Himself. He numbers him among His children (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2).

How interesting and attractive this representation of the Divine character. Have you contemplated God only with dread as the righteous Judge? Let His mercy be also taken into the account. His mercy does not destroy His justice; His justice consents to the exercise of mercy. For justice is satisfied when Jesus dies.

The subject suggests solemn inquiry. All are sinners. Are all our sins forgiven? Have we turned from sin? Have we trusted in the Saviour? Let there be a continued resting in Him. Let there be a steadfast current of the heart's preferences towards God's ways. Let there be watchful holiness and earnest usefulness.

Are your sins not forgiven? Living on with all the sins of your life against you as an uncancelled debt? Kind and amiable in your deportment; you would not wrong any man. Yet you live in this state of alienation from God. And you are allowing the opportunity of reconciliation to slip

past you. You cannot say you are unforgiven because He is unwilling to forgive. Conscience says it is because you have never sought forgiveness, because you do not like the terms on which it is offered. You will not relinquish your sins. You will not come to Him that you might have life.

Do you say you would gladly come; that you earnestly desire forgiveness; that you are willing to have Christ if He will only have you? What have you to fear? Does not the Gospel proclaim the forgiving God? Come to Him then. "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."—*J. Rawlinson.*

There is one thing that God always does with sin. He removes it out of His presence. When He casts away a guilty soul, and when He pardons a penitent soul, He is doing the same thing—removing sin absolutely and infinitely. In the depth of His justice, I see the height of His mercy. There is not a greater distance between a soul in hell and heaven than there is between a pardoned man and a pardoned man's sins. When we think of sin's power and consequences, what can be compared with that single word, *forgiveness?*

I. THE AUTHOR OF FORGIVENESS. "I, even I," an expression which denotes that God is taking to Himself, in some especial degree, some sovereign prerogative.

In earthly things, when a sovereign passes pardon, he has been aggrieved, indeed, in so far as the cause of justice is the cause of all; but still he has no personal injury to forgive. Or, when an offended man forgives his enemy, there comes across his mind the recollection that he must stand in need of pardon too. But now mark it with God. He is the being most nearly concerned in all the transgressions you have ever committed (H. E. I. 4473–4480). *His* law was broken; *His* empire disarranged; *His* mercy trampled upon; *His* love frustrated (verse 24). But then, how grandly comes in the text! Were it that one God is injured and another God steps in to make the atonement and forgive, I should marvel less. But here lies the wonder, that God whom we provoke, despise, and neglect, originates the plan and conducts the scheme of mercy Himself.

Carry this thought a step further into the *manner* in which pardon of sin is procured. Men wish to do something to help their pardon. If they could feel more, pray more, do more, and be better than they are, they might hope for forgiveness. We want to find some reason in ourselves why God should forgive us. We endeavour to have before pardon that which will never come till after pardon. But how does God forgive? Like a sovereign: not because you are good, but because He is love. This is the hinging-point of the peace of thousands, who will not take forgiveness as an act of mercy.

Look, again, at the text in respect to the way by which the sense of forgiveness when it is granted is communicated to a man's mind. This is the direct work of Almighty God, who has never communicated it to any man to do it. It belongs not to any living man to pronounce a sinner's pardon in any other than a conditional or declaratory sense. If you desire a clear apprehension of God's reconciling love, you must acknowledge that to Him alone it appertaineth to forgive sin. The Author of forgiveness, then, is God. All the attributes are brought to bear upon your peace—omnipotence, unchangeableness, love, justice. The pardoned sinner stands upon the eternal, leans upon the infinite, and looks out upon the unfading. It is the very Saviour who shed His life-blood, that says, "I, even I" (Rom. viii. 33, 34).

II. THE NATURE OF FORGIVENESS.

1. In respect of *time*. The verb runs in the present tense. It is not "I have blotted," nor, "I will blot," but something far better. Probably, the metaphor is taken from a man obliter-

ating with a sponge the record made upon a tablet. We think of God as unwilling to forgive; but He is ready, always waiting to blot out the record of every sin, as the mist that gathers round the mountain top is dispersed by the breeze. See, then, the Christian's privilege. He looks up to God and he is forgiven. And He who forgives once goes on day after day forgiving. He does not upbraid, and say, "I forgave you yesterday, and I cannot forgive you to-day." Sins are falling every moment upon that book, but the hand of love wipes out the record. A drop of blood fell on the page and washed it all away like snow. O try it! There is God waiting to wipe out every trace of your sin, if only you look up in simple faith to Him.

2. In respect of *degree*. I thank God for that little word "out." None can read a trace where God's so bliterating hand has once passed. You never read of a *partial* cure wrought by Christ on earth, and you never find such a thing in the history of the Church as the partial healing of a man's soul. Whatever God does is infinite. It is *out*—"blotteth out." Some may feel, "God has forgiven me that sin, but not all my sins." That is impossible. There never was the case of a man upon the earth who has had only one sin forgiven.

There is a distinction between "transgression" and "sin." The former is the wicked act that lies upon the surface; the latter the deep corruption that lies within the heart. God blots out the transgressions, and will not remember the sins. He deals with both the stream and the fountain. Do not misunderstand me. God's people commit sin, and are punished very heavily for it in this world after forgiveness. But sin is never *imputed* to a man in Christ Jesus (Rom. viii. 1).

3. In respect of *continuance*. The present swells out into the future. It stretches on to your sick and dying bed; it meets you at the judgment-seat—"I will not remember."

III. THE REASON OF FORGIVENESS God finds all motive within Himself—"for mine own name's sake." You say, "Does not He seek the good of His creatures?" Yes; but the good of His creatures and His own glory are identical. You ask, "Why does God forgive a rebel creature?" The answer is nowhere in the creature. It is not in prayer, not in repentance, not in faith; but it is in God. Here is our confidence. God's forgiveness is not like the ocean. It has the ocean's depths, but not the ocean's tides. Therefore He has based it, not on the universe, but on Himself. If the ground of your pardon rested on yourself or your fellow-creatures, on the holy motives you cherished, on the good deeds you performed, what hope could there be of forgiveness? The reason for forgiveness is found in that eternal counsel wherein God gave to His Son a kingdom; in God's will that there should be a multitude round the throne of His glory; in that unfathomable love in which He is the loving Father of all His creatures; in justice, where, in faithfulness to His Son, He hath made it unjust to punish one pardoned in the Son; in that immutable wisdom wherein He hath given us an earnest of His forgiveness; but above all, seek it in that spot where His love, power, and wisdom stand out unitedly magnified, that purest revelation of His being, that bright effulgence of His name, wherein all meet—in the man Christ Jesus, the crucified, the risen Saviour.—*James Vaughan, M.A.: Fifty Sermons*, pp. 279–288.

I. Free grace blots out our transgressions FROM GOD'S BOOK.

II. WITH GOD'S HAND. 1. The recording hand. 2. The hand of Him against whom you have offended. 3. The rejected hand. 4. The avenging hand. 5. The spotless hand of justice. 6. The hand of the Supreme Being. 7. The hand of the unchanging God.

III. FOR GOD'S SAKE. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy trans-

gressions, *for mine own sake*" (Ezek. xxxvi. 21–22; 32). Everything God does is for His glory. "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things." "*Of Him*," as the great cause; "*through Him*," as the great worker; "*to Him*," as the great end.

1. Is it for the glory of God to manifest *His infinite wisdom?* See it, in its brightness, in this work of salvation.

2. Is it for His glory to manifest *His infinite justice?* In the salvation of the Church, God has revealed that justice in its inflexible severity. (1.) In the eternal plan of salvation by sacrifice. (2.) Shining in the solemn glory of the cross of Emmanuel.

3. Is it for His glory to manifest *His infinite power?* See it in the fearful miracles of Egypt; in the merciful deeds of the great Miracle-Worker; in the pardoning of sins, the destroying of the works of the devil, the regeneration of the corrupt, the resurrection of the dead, the restoration of immortality, and the everlasting reign of righteousness.

4. Is it for His glory to manifest *His infinite love?* In the salvation of the Church it is revealed in its immeasurable greatness; in His compassion for the perishing, forbearance towards the rebellious, forgiveness of the repenting, and in His kindness to the believing.

IV. FROM GOD'S MEMORY. "I will not remember thy sins." A heavenly truth in an earthly dress.—*H. Grattan Guinness: Sermons*, pp. 333–363.

If we were to ask, who need the forgiveness of sins? the ready answer would be, sinners. All men are sinners (Rom. iii. 10, 12, 23, and 1 John i. 8, 10). The dreadful reality of sin *in* us, and sin *on* us, making us sinners in the deepest sense, gives the teaching of the Word touching forgiveness a large and living interest to us all.

I. *The fact that God forgives sin.* Stated in Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7; 2 Chron. vii. 14; Ps. lxxxvi. 5; cxxx. 4. Illustrated in David (Ps. xxxii. 5). Sick of the palsy (Matt. ix. 2). Woman in Simon's house (Luke vii. 48).

II. *The meritorious ground on which God forgives.* Christ Jesus (Col. i 14; 1 John ii. 12; Acts x. 43; Rom. iii. 24, 25). The question may be asked, What has Christ done that He forgives for His sake? See Heb. ix. 22–26; 1 Pet. iii. 18; Isa. liii. 5, 6.

III. *The conditions in us necessary to forgiveness.* Repentance (John i. 9; Acts iii. 19). Faith (Acts xiii. 38). Forsaking sin (Prov. xxviii. 13).

IV. *The perfection of Divine forgiveness.* 1. Sins are blotted out (Isa. xliii. 25). 2. Totally removed from sight (Isa. i. 18). 3. Forgotten for ever (Jer. xxxi. 34; Heb. x. 17).

V. *The consequences of forgiveness.* We have:—1. Life (Col. ii. 13). 2. Blessedness in the soul (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2; 1 John v. 10). 3. Praise in the heart (Isa. xii. 1). 4. The fear of God (Ps. cxxx. 4; Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9). 5. Reconciliation with God (Luke xv. 12–32). 6. Praise and joy (Rom. v. 1, 2).—*J. A. R. Dickson.*

We may learn:—

I. **That it is God only who can pardon sin.** How vain, then, is it for man to attempt it! How wicked for man to claim the prerogative! And yet it is an essential part of the Papal system, that the Pope and his priests have the power of remitting the penalty of transgression.

II. **That this is done by God solely for His own sake.** It is not—1. Because we have any claim to it, for then it would not be pardon, but justice. 2. Nor have we any power to compel God to forgive—for who can contend with Him, and how can mere power procure pardon? 3. Nor have we any merit, for then also it would be justice; and we have no merit. 4. Nor is it primarily in order that we may be happy—for our happiness is a matter not worthy to be named, compared with the honour of God. But it is solely for His own sake; to promote His glory; to show His perfections; to evince the greatness of His mercy; and to show His boundless and eternal love.

III. They who are pardoned should live to His glory, and not to themselves. For *that* they were forgiven.

IV. If men are ever pardoned, they must come to God—and to God alone. They must come not to *justify* themselves, but to confess their crimes; and they must come with a willingness that God should pardon them on just such *terms* as He pleases; at just such a *time* as He pleases; and solely with a view to the promotion of His own glory. Unless they have this feeling, they never *can* be forgiven, nor *should* they be forgiven.—*A. Barnes.*

The text solves most of the problems arising out of our moral condition.

I. OUR NEED OF FORGIVENESS. This is evident on account of our transgressions. All guilty before God. The text refers to one species of moral evil—"transgressions"—violations of the Divine law. They are—1. *Diversified.* Against both tables—Divine providences, &c. 2. *Numberless.* 3. *Individual*—distinctly ours. 4. *Heinous.* As committed against a good and gracious God, &c. As scarlet and crimson. 5. *Recorded.* Symbol of the text (Rev. xx. 11. &c.) 6. *Connected with Divine penalties.* 7. *No created being can deliver us from the results of our transgressions.* No priest, &c. Jesus only.

II. THE DIVINE DECLARATION AS TO BLOTTING OUT TRANSGRESSION. Striking. I, the Creator (ver. 15); the Jehovah (ver. 3); the Holy One of Israel (ver. 3); your Redeemer (ver. 14). 1. He has sovereign right to do so. 2. His infinite love and mercy disposes Him to do so (Ex. xxxii. 18, &c.) 3. This Divine nature and name Christ the Saviour possessed as the Son of God (Col. ii. 9). He was appointed the Mediator, and by and through His person, merit, and work we obtain forgiveness of sin. There is salvation in none other. 4. By faith in the Gospel of Christ, we realise the removal of our sins.

CONCLUSION.—God blots out all sin utterly and for ever. The erasure is complete. How solicitous we should be to hear God speaking thus to our hearts, by His Holy Spirit. There is no excuse for the unforgiven.—*J. Burns, D.D., LL.D.: Sketches and Outlines*, pp. 348.

THE SPIRIT PROMISED TO THE SEED OF JACOB.

xliv. 1–5. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my Servant, &c.*

The three Divine Persons in the Godhead are represented in Scripture as concurring in the salvation of fallen man. Our text is one of those interesting passages in which the Holy Spirit is promised in the Old Testament.

I. THE PEOPLE TO WHOM THE PROMISE IS MADE. The "seed" or "offspring" of Jacob, *i.e.*, those who resemble Jacob in his state and character, in his spirit and conduct. 1. Jacob is here represented as the *creature* of God. "Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb." The same is true of all His spiritual children (Eph. ii. 10). 2. God had *chosen* Jacob. Twice declared in our text. True also of His spiritual children (1 Pet. ii. 9). 3. In the text twice called the servant of God. His children are also in the same capacity (Acts xxvii. 23; Rom. xii. 1). 3. Jacob is also called *Israel.* We know on what occasion that name was first given him (Gen. xxii. 28). It is the memorial of his triumph in prayer; and the promise in our text is made to those who, like Jacob, wrestle with God in prayer for spiritual blessings, 5. Jacob is here called *Jesurun, i.e.*, "the upright one." Those who are interested in this promise are such as are upright before God. Imperfection may cleave to them; overpowered by temptation, they may fall into sin; yet they are sincere (H. E. I. 1022).

II. THE PROMISE MADE IN THE TEXT (ver. 3). What is here promised is the Holy Spirit of God, the Sanctifier and Comforter of the Church. A blessing in which all other blessings may be said to be included. With it, and it alone, there come to the soul spiritual life, pardon, purity, peace, and meetness for heaven. Here promised under the emblem of water.

Water is a blessing—1. *Universally necessary.* Without it, both man and beast must speedily perish. 2. *Universally diffused.* In some countries, indeed, it is more abundant than in others; but there is no habitable region on the face of the earth where it is entirely wanting. Nor is the Holy Spirit confined to a few favoured ones (Acts ii. 17). This promise is being fulfilled. 3. *Abundant.* Note the promise of the text: "pour floods." He will communicate His Spirit copiously to earnest suppliants. 4. *Cheap.* Generally cheap, as the light of the sun, or as the air we breathe. What can be cheaper than the grace of the Spirit? Too precious to be sold (Job xxviii. 14). It is the free gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (John iv. 10).

III. THE EFFECTS ATTENDING THE FULFILMENT OF THIS PROMISE (vers. 4, 5). When the earth has been long without rain, the whole face of nature assumes a mournful and sterile appearance. Let rain be given, and fertility and beauty are seen on every side. Without the Holy Spirit, there is barrenness in the Church. When the Spirit is poured out upon the Church, what are the results?

1. *Its converts become exceedingly numerous.* "They shall spring up as among the grass"—numerous as the blades of grass. Preliminary fulfilments of the promise (Acts ii. 41, iv. 41, v. 14). In every age since that time, the number of converts has multiplied in proportion to the outpouring of the Spirit.

2. *Its converts become distinguished for the rapidity and luxuriance of their spiritual growth.* "They spring up as willows by the water-courses" (cf. Hos. xiv. 5-7). The young convert, watered by the dews of the Spirit, makes rapid progress in spiritual knowledge and in grace. He rivals the lily in grace, the olive-tree in beauty, the cedar in stateliness, and the vine in fruitfulness. He ripens as quickly as the full-grown ear of corn; and, like the vine of Lebanon, diffuses around him the most delightful fragrance.

3. *They are animated by the purest spirit of self-dedication to the Lord, and of cordial attachment to His people* (ver. 5). That is, they shall dedicate themselves to the Lord as His faithful servants and sincere worshippers; and separating themselves from the ungodly and profane, shall solemnly and publicly join themselves to His Church. That this is the duty of those who have been converted and benefited by the Spirit, may be safely inferred from the practice of the Church in every age (Acts ii. 44, 46). Can we do better than follow the example set us by the primitive Church? Is it not at once our duty and the most likely way to promote the edification and salvation of our souls? Are we not more likely to go to heaven in company with those who travel thither, than by keeping aloof from them? (H. E. I. 3903-3911.)

CONCLUSION.—1. *What resemblance do we bear to the character of the people to whom the promise is made?* Is the workmanship of God seen in us? Does the sanctity of our lives prove that we are His elect people? Are we men of fervent and persevering prayer? Are we sincere and upright before God?

2. *Has the promise of the text been fulfilled to our souls?* We so absolutely need the grace of the Spirit that we must perish, if we have it not. There is no good reason why we should be without it; like water, it is everywhere placed within our reach, and may be obtained in the greatest abundance by only asking for it. How inexcusable, then, must we be, if we still remain without it!

3. Some of us profess to have re-

ceived the Spirit! What are the effects which He has produced on our spirit and conduct? (H. E. I. 2897, 2898, 1430–1437).

4. *Have you truly dedicated yourself to God? and have you joined His people? —Daniel Rees: Sermons*, pp. 469–479.

The Holy Spirit and His Influence on Man.

(*For Whit-Sunday.*)

xliv. 3, 4. *I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, &c.*

When God designed the recovery of ruined man, He purposed to accomplish the gracious and glorious work by two great means: by giving the Son to take upon Him our nature, to obey and suffer for us therein; and by sending the Holy Spirit, to render all that Christ has done and suffered for us applicable and effectual to the salvation of our souls.

In this Scripture an abundant effusion of the Spirit is promised to the Church, under the emblem of water: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." Being made truly sensible of spiritual need, and earnestly desirous of something better than creature satisfaction, this declaration promises a supply of spiritual blessings for the refreshment of the soul. Is that soul barren as the dry ground where there is no water? There is an enlargement of the promise—*floods* of grace are spoken of: "and floods upon the dry ground." Then there is an explanation, in the plainest language: "I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessings upon thine offspring."

This promise was strikingly fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. It is doubtless to have a more complete fulfilment in that happy and glorious state which yet awaits the Church, when the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea. But it has also a most important reference to those operations which are carried on by the Holy Spirit in our own souls, and upon which our salvation depends (John iii. 3). Let us, then, reverently study what has been revealed to us in the Word of God concerning the being and operations of the Holy Spirit.

I. The Holy Spirit.

1. The Spirit, of whom this and other Scriptures speak to us, is *Divine*. (1) This, and more, is involved in our Lord's command, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name *of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*." (2) The same distinguishing names and titles are given continually in the Word of God to the Holy Ghost, as belong to no other than Almighty God. "The Lord" (2 Cor. iii. 1. Cf. Isaiah vi. 9 with Acts xxviii. 25). "God" (Acts v. 3). "Jehovah" (Cf. Isaiah lxiii. 14 with Deut. xxxii. 12 and Num. xiv. 11).

2. The Holy Spirit is not an attribute or operation of God the Father *His distinct personality* is clearly manifest from several scriptures.

(1.) From distinct and visible appearances. *At the baptism of our Lord.* In Matt. iii. 16, we read of a distinct manifestation of three Sacred Persons, at one time and place: The voice of the Father was heard, "This is my beloved Son;" the Lord Jesus came up out of the Jordan; and the Holy Spirit in a bodily shape descended from heaven, and lighted upon Him. *On the day of Pentecost.* He visibly descended on the apostles, in the likeness of fire.

(2.) To "the Spirit" divine and personal attributes are assigned. He is *eternal* (Heb. ix. 14). *Omnipresent* (Ps. cxxxix. 7). *Omniscient* (1 Cor. ii. 10).

(3.) He acts in a personal manner, as one who has a distinct and personal will (John xiv. 7, 8; 1 Cor. xii. 11).

(4.) He has personal appellations (Isaiah xi. 2; John xiv. 16, 26). He is called "*a Comforter*," which is the name of a person, and of one vested

with an office; "*another Comforter*," to distinguish Him from God the Son, who is a Comforter and indisputably a Person.

(5.) The immediate care and government of the Christian Church has been committed peculiarly to the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is His especial work, spiritual life His especial gift; by Him the work of sanctification is carried on; all Christian holiness, and the exercise of every grace, proceed from Him (John iii. 3; 2 Thess. ii. 13; 2 Cor. xiii. 14, &c.) He also qualifies and appoints persons to minister in the Church of Christ, and claims their services (Acts xiii. 2, xx. 28).

These testimonies place it beyond doubt that the Holy Spirit is a divine, distinct, and self-existent person, infinite in all His attributes; that He is also, with the Father and the Son, One, God over all, blessed for evermore (H. E. I. 2867).

II. HIS OPERATIONS IN THE HUMAN SOUL.

He is the great Teacher, the Spirit of Illumination, the promised Guide, who alone can lead us into a saving knowledge of the truth. We all continue in a state of spiritual darkness and death until by His mighty power we are born again. It is only through His agency that the corruptions of the human heart can be subdued and mortified, and a holy conformity to the will of God either acquired or sustained. He is the great and only true Comforter, from whom alone any solid consolations come. His work in the soul is just as necessary for its salvation as was the work that was finished on the Cross; and no man, however wise or learned he may be, knows really one tittle more of spiritual things than he is experimentally taught them by the Holy Ghost. His blessed influences, which are so absolutely necessary to us, should be earnestly sought (H. E. I. 2871–2891; P. D. 1815–1821).—*John Johnstone, M.A.: The Way of Life*, pp. 172–196.

The suitableness of this passage to the important subject of the day, when we commemorate the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, is obvious. Let us consider—

I. THE PROMISE. "I will pour," &c. This, then, is a promise of the Spirit, which is here compared, as in other scriptures, to water, on account partly of its purifying, and partly of its comforting properties. For as water cleanses the body and quenches thirst, so the Spirit purifies the soul and satisfies spiritual desires.

But who are they upon whom the Spirit is poured? 1. *Upon the people of God*, compared to the earth in the drought of summer, parched and thirsting for rain; upon those who are sensible of their spiritual barrenness, and are not looking for the supply of their wants to their own imaginary merits or strength, but are trusting in the mercy of God through Christ. Upon these the Lord will shed the Holy Ghost abundantly. 2. *Upon the children of believers.*

II. ITS EFFECTS. "And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses." The image here employed implies two things—an increase of the Church, and a growth of individual piety. As plants and herbs spring up of themselves and spread in a grassy and well-watered spot, so did the Christian religion at first rapidly extend itself, through the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. Thousands were converted by a single sermon, and churches were planted over the whole of the then known world. As the willow situate by the river's side shoots up quickly, so he upon whom the Lord pours His Spirit plentifully thrives and flourishes in the divine life. His faith becomes steadfast, his love pure and fervent, his humility profound, his knowledge and wisdom extensive and deep, his zeal ardent and constant, lowly and meek, his deadness to the world thorough, and his devotedness to God unreserved.

If the gift of the Spirit be so important, *how earnestly should we pray for it!* Prayer is the appointed means of obtaining every blessing, whether

temporal or spiritual, which God has to bestow. It is the particular duty annexed to the promise of the Spirit (Ezek. xxxvi. 27 and 37). Neglect it not! Pray first of all for your own dry and barren souls, that they may be visited with an abundant outpouring of the Spirit, and thereby be softened, refreshed, and fertilised. Pray next for your children, and pray in faith, expecting, on the ground of the new covenant and of the Divine promises, that your prayers will be heard and answered; your children are included in the promise as well as yourselves. Make a constant practice of praying "for the good estate of the Catholic Church, that it may be so guided and governed by God's good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in the unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life."—*James Gibson, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 87–99.

Three things demand our attention—

I. THE NECESSITY OF DIVINE INFLUENCE.

This is seen in the condition of the persons to whom this promise is addressed. Graphic and affecting terms are used to describe the state of the Church when the grace of the Spirit is withdrawn or withheld. It is a state—1. Of *destitution*. The face of nature is entirely dependent on the dews and rains of heaven for its picturesque and fruitful appearance. In their absence the earth pines and languishes. Think of the condition and appearance of Israel, when for more than three years rain was withheld from it. As dependent is the heart of man upon God; where His gracious influence is not exerted, there is no true peace or joy. 2. Of *sterility*. This is denoted by the phrase "dry ground." Dry ground is barren. Equally barren is the human heart in the absence of divine influence; it brings forth nothing valuable. 3. *This destitution and barrenness extends even to the rising generation*. Grace is not hereditary. The children of the most devout are individually dependent on God for all excellence. Unless that dependence is exercised, all the excellences resulting from their religious education will dwindle away and ultimately die. The necessity of divine influence clings to us all.

II. THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE INFLUENCE.

This is represented in the metaphor by which it is described, "I will pour *water*," &c. The opposite metaphor, *fire*, is also used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. The propriety and beauty of the metaphor employed here will appear if we consider—1. *The peculiar proprieties of the promised blessing*. Remember (1.) its cleansing influence. (2.) Its softening power. (3.) Its fertilising tendency. (4.) Its satisfying quality. Nothing else so effectually quenches thirst. 2. *The manner of its bestowment*. (1.) It falls from heaven. (2.) It is imparted freely. (3.) It is poured forth copiously. "*Floods* upon the dry ground."

III. THE EFFECTS OF DIVINE INFLUENCE.

When it is exerted, the results are seen—1. *In numerous conversions to God* (ver. 4). As grass springs up in the water-courses, and willows grow in the moistened earth, so where the Spirit is poured forth numbers of converts arise to call the Redeemer blessed. 2. *In consecration to the service of Christ* (ver. 5). (1.) It is individual and personal. (2.) It is marked by holy decision openly avowed. (3.) It is influential in its example. "One shall say . . . and another!"

CONCLUSION. — 1. This promise should teach us to cultivate dependence on the Holy Spirit. 2. Let us derive encouragement to seek an enlarged effusion of the Divine influence for ourselves and for others. 3. The promise and the pictures of the text appeal to you young folk. They show you what you are without the Holy Spirit; what you may become under His gracious influence; and they stimulate you to that personal dedication to God on which your present and eternal

well-being depends. — *George Smith, D.D.*

Who are they that shall participate in these rich blessings? The region surveyed by the promise is one of destitution. It is a "dry ground." Months since a drop of rain fell. It is parched. Nothing grows. The land is thirsty. The land and people represent God's Church. It was a separated people (ver. 2). Jacob and Israel, names of the chosen people. Jesurun, "my righteous" or "beloved one." So that the promise of the text relates to the Church.

1. IN ITSELF. This is the primary idea. The Church is depressed. Here is a promise of revival and refreshing. This is God's usual course. He reanimates the spiritual life within the Church before He extends it beyond. The world's conversion is through the Church. But if, like salt that has lost its savour, it has become incapable of its proper influence, how shall its capacity be regained? Only by a new outpouring of the Spirit from on high. God brought back His people; then the heathen knew that He was the Lord. At the Day of Pentecost the Spirit was first given to the disciples, then to the multitude. "Beginning at Jerusalem."

2. IN ITS CHILDREN. The special promise of the text is that the children shall be brought under the saving influence. "I will pour my Spirit on thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (Acts ii. 39). There is a special propriety and beauty in the arrangement that the Christian parent should be the means of training his children for the Church. If the children of Christians are not Christians, it is usually because the parents have failed in some respect to be to their children what they should have been. We ought to be able to look around on the families of Christians and anticipate their union in the fellowship of the Church as a matter of course.

Thus there is in this promise the idea of the Gospel's perpetuation in the world. It shall not expire with the existing generation. If not a single convert were added from the regions beyond, it will continue to live in the children of God's people. So that, though the grass withers and the flower fades; though the man dies and is forgotten, the Word of the Lord, which by the Gospel is preached unto you, endureth for ever. Is not the greater proportion of conversions usually among the young? Is not this a fulfilment of the promise? Let Christian parents and Christian ministers be specially interested in the young (H. E. I. 781–788, 795, 803–806).

Nor does it terminate there. It spreads outwards. Unlike Gideon's fleece, which was saturated while the surrounding ground remained dry, the dew which falls upon the Church reaches the region outside (Ezek. xxxiv. 26). Large numbers attend our Christian sanctuaries who do not identify themselves with the Church. They hear the Gospel; are interested in its success; but they have not its blessing. The waters of salvation are flowing around them; but their souls remain parched. For them every Christian should pray. They will suffer me to say a word to them. You are like a drowning man who clings to the side of the boat, but refuses to enter it. This is not God's fault. It is your own. How long shall it continue?

We want more prayer for the Holy Spirit; a more real belief in His work. —*J. Rawlinson.*

REVIVAL: A HOMILY FOR SPRING.

xliv. 3, 4. *For I will pour water, &c.*

Foremost among the judgments which followed Israel's idolatries was the visitation of drought. We enjoy copious supplies of fertilising rain. Yet, even in our own land, a sensible reduction of the rain-fall in spring is followed by empty shocks in August. But in the sunny climes of Syria, if

the half-yearly gift of rain failed, the effect was disastrous in the extreme.

If drought is so injurious in the fields of nature, is it not equally injurious in the Church? In our text there is,

I. A STATE OF BARRENNESS DESCRIBED. The ground is said to be "dry," in a parched and impenetrable condition. Deadly to vegetable growth. With such homely imagery the prophet leads our thoughts from the outer world to the inner. Is it *my* soul that is here described? Whatever be the reason, God shall be held clear of blame; and, like the first sign of approaching spring, comes His gracious promise, "I will pour," &c.

II. A SENSE OF NEED EXPRESSED. The insensibility is gone. The rigid hardness of winter is at an end. Who is there among us whose spirit thirsts not? (Matt. v. 6.)

III. A GENEROUS GIFT PROVIDED. A promise from God is as good as its performance.

1. The *source* of the supply. The great folly to which all men are prone is to seek the supply of their wants elsewhere than in God. Yet God has wisely ordained that nowhere out of Himself shall man's highest good be found.

2. The *suitableness* of the means. Showers for a thirsty soul—mercy's gifts to satisfy the wants of dependent man. Showers of spiritual influence to refresh our drooping piety. Not half so skilfully do the several parts of a key fit into the wards of a complicated lock as the gifts of Christ fit the needs of a human soul.

3. The *copiousness* of the gift. If showers will not suffice, there shall be "floods."

4. The *range* of the promise. It shall not terminate with *ourselves;* it shall extend to our children—ay, to our children's children. Consolation for parents. The spirit of piety is as contagious as the spirit of profanity. If our Christian faith and love be vigorous, our ambition for our children will be, not riches, &c., but *salvation*.

IV. ABUNDANT FERTILITY FORESEEN There shall be a revival of life in the Church, as in the parched fields after a copious shower, as in nature at the advent of spring. What a delightful change!

1. *Multiplicity of conversions* is here predicted. Appearances may be unfavourable; unbelief may ridicule the hope; but the word has gone forth, and cannot fail.

2. *Rapidity of growth* shall be another feature of this era. Now, for the most part, growth is slow; good fruit is scanty. We scarce can tell whether we gain or lose. But when the heavenly rain shall descend, the young life will break through every bond, will send out new shoots, and make every branch fruitful.

3. *Constancy of verdure* will be enjoyed. They shall be "as willows by the water-courses."—*D. Davies, M.A.: Homiletic Quarterly*, vol. iv. p. 407.

These words describe a time of refreshing.

I. *Who is the Author of a work of grace?* God.

1. He begins a work of anxiety in dead souls (Zech. xii.; John xvi.; Ezek. xxxvii.) 2. He carries on the work, leading awakened persons to Christ (Joel ii. 28, 32). 3. He enlarges His people. Learn (1.) To look beyond ministers for a work of grace; (2.) Good hope of revival in our day; (3.) That we should pray for it.

II. *God begins with thirsty souls.* 1 Awakened persons. 2. Thirsty believers. Signs: (1.) Much thirst after the word. (2.) Much prayer. (3.) Desire to grow in grace.

III. *God pours floods on the dry ground.* Represents those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Marks: (1.) They do not pray. (2.) They do not wish a work of grace in their souls. (3.) Those who do not attend to the preached word.

Learn, Christians, to pray for floods of blessing.

IV. *Effects.* 1. Saved souls will be like grass. 2. Believers shall grow like willows. 3. Self-dedication.—*R. M. M'Cheyne: Sermons*, pp. 66–72.

THE CHURCH AND THE CHILDREN.

(For the third Sunday in October, the day for "universal prayer and effort on behalf of Sunday-schools and young people.")

xliv. 3–5. *For I will pour water, &c.*

The third Sunday in October is, in many places, an anniversary associated with blessed recollections. If the mighty hosts of godly parents and Sunday-school workers agree to ask for the gift of the Holy Ghost, it will be made manifest that we are among the heirs of Pentecost; in our dwellings, &c., we shall be richly blessed, and multitudes of the young will be added to the Church, according to these glorious declarations. Let there be no misgiving; these "exceeding great and precious promises" are "unto us and our children."

I. GOD'S PROMISE OF BLESSING UPON THE CHURCH.

1. The *nature* of the promised blessing. Consists in the influences of the Holy Spirit which are frequently represented in the Scriptures, and especially by Isaiah, under the figure of water, either as "streams," "rivers," or "floods." Here the terms "water" and "Spirit" are used interchangeably (cf. John vii. 38, 39). Analogy between water in the natural world, and the Spirit's influences in the moral world. Whatever good there is in the Holy Spirit's agency, this promise includes them all, for when God gives His Spirit, He gives all other blessings (Luke v. 23 with Matt. vii. 5).

2. *Abundant.* The terms employed indicate communications commensurate with the existing need, however great. Like torrents of rain poured on the thirsty earth. The *fulness* of the Spirit's influences shall be communicated to us if we seek in the way of obedient prayer and faith. Not a solitary promise—one of a group (Ezek. xxxiv. 26; Joel ii. 28; Hosea xiv. 5; Mal. iii. 10, &c.) Had their first grand and signal fulfilment upon the day of Pentecost—the beginning of the fulfilment of these promises. Acts ii. 39 proves the universality of the promise. It is yours *now*. What abundant communications of divine influence we should expect!

3. *Needed.* God's ancient people were in a sadly backsliding state. They needed the bestowment of divine influence. So do we. (1.) The low and languid piety of the Church. (2.) The comparatively small success of the various agencies for the conversion of sinners. Our agencies will not be spiritually useful upon anything like a large scale, until they are charged with spiritual force.

4. *Must be sought.* The promise is made to the "thirsty." God gives what He promises only in answer to prayer. His promise cannot fail.

5. The *results* will be most glorious. Individuals. Church. World.

II. GOD'S PROMISE OF BLESSING UPON THE CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH. Has made the hearts of multitudes of pious parents and teachers thrill with delight. Accords with many others.

1. Our children need the Holy Spirit. No natural goodness can supersede the work of the Spirit. Religion not hereditary.

2. God promises to give the Spirit as abundantly to them as to us. Same terms used in each case. Having received the Spirit, they are to grow in grace most vigorously (ver. 4). The manifestation of this in public (ver. 5).

3. Must be sought. As in the former case, so in this. The universal Church is seeking this blessing to-day upon Sunday-schools and young people. Grand and inspiring fact! The salvation of our children is placed before us as the crowning glory of the Church when she is in the full tide of her prosperity. Let parents and teachers, &c., expect the fulfilment of the promise to-day.

CONCLUSION.—A word to unconverted parents. You are glad to see

your children pious, though you are neglecting salvation yourselves. One of the strongest reasons why you should seek it. How sacred and solemn is the parental relationship.—*A. Tucker.*

I. That God will pour His blessing on the children of His people. A promise which in all ages, when parents are faithful, is abundantly fulfilled.

II. That one of the richest blessings which can be imparted to a people is, that God's Spirit should descend on their children.

III. That the Spirit of God alone is the source of true happiness and prosperity to our children. All else—property, learning, accomplishments, beauty, vigour—will be vain. It is by His blessing only—by the influences of piety—that they will spring forth, &c.

IV. Parents should pray earnestly for a revival of religion. No better description can be given of it than we have here. Who would not pray for such a work of grace? What family, what congregation, what people can be happy without it?—*A. Barnes.*

A Public Profession of Religion.

xliv. 5. *One shall say, I am the Lord's, &c.*

This chapter begins with a prediction of the future prosperity and increase of the Church of God; and the prophet here represents converts as spontaneously choosing to make a public profession of religion.

I. Some reasons why true converts desire to make a public profession of religion.

1. *Those who have experienced a saving change of heart love God's law.* It is in the creation of such a love within them that this change consists (Jer. xxxi. 33; Ps. cxix. 97). Those who love God's law choose to obey it, and to bind themselves to obey it for ever (Jer. l. 4, 5). 2. *They love God's ordinances.* They delight to observe them all, especially that which commemorates the death of their Divine Redeemer (Acts ii. 41, 47). 3. *They love God's people,* and delight to unite with them in the duties of religion, and in their attendance on divine ordinances. 4. *They love God's cause.* They desire to be workers together with God in building up His kingdom, and for this reason wish to put themselves in the best situation, and under the strongest obligations to promote the cause of truth and the prosperity of Zion. Their profession gives them a greater freedom, and creates a greater obligation to speak and act for God and for the good of their fellow-men. 5. *They desire to grow in grace;* and for that reason desire to join the Church, that they may enjoy the best means of spiritual instruction and edification. 6. *They desire to persevere to the end;* and being conscious of the deceitfulness of their own hearts, and their proneness to forget and forsake God, they gladly avail themselves of the help that is afforded by a public vow and covenant to be steadfast in His service (H. E. I. 3903–3911).

As all who make a profession of religion are not Christians, so neither are all who omit to do so unbelievers. Let us note, therefore—

II. Some excuses which some converts offer for not making a public profession of religion.

1. "*I am not absolutely certain that I am a Christian.*" But you hope you are; and will disobeying God do anything to turn your hope into a settled confidence? The way to get more grace is to use the grace you have. 2. "*I do not know that the Church would receive me.*" Why not? Do you think that the Church is not competent to arrive at a just judgment concerning you? or that it would wilfully judge you unjustly? or that your excellences are so transcendent that full justice would not be done to them? If *this* is what you mean, you are not worthy to enter the Church. But if your fear

of not being accepted arises from a humiliating sense of your own unworthiness, such humility will rather commend you to the esteem and confidence of good men. 3. "*I fear I should do more dishonour than honour to religion.*" But you have no right to fear anything of the kind. God promises to sustain you with His all-sufficient grace. Put away this sinful, because unbelieving, fear. 4. "*I know a great many good people who are not Church members.*" That is no concern of yours. Their neglect will not excuse yours (John xxi. 21, 22; Rom. xiv. 12). 5. "*A great many Church members are no better than they ought to be.*" True. Let us be sorry that it is so. But this is no reason why you should neglect to name Christ's name and promote His cause; it is rather a strong reason why you should unite with His few friends to purify, strengthen, and revive religion, and to rectify whatever is amiss in the Church. Note—

III. SOME OF THE EVILS THAT RESULT FROM THIS NEGLECT TO MAKE A PUBLIC PROFESSION OF RELIGION.

Those who are guilty of it—1. *Injure themselves,* by depriving themselves of that peace and comfort which they might enjoy in communion with God and His people. 2. *They injure religion,* by neglecting to perform those peculiar and important duties by which it is to be promoted in the world. 3. *They injure the friends of God* by practically joining with the world in neglecting and opposing the cause which they desire and have bound themselves to promote (Matt. xii. 30). 4. *They injure the impenitent* by practically justifying them in their impenitence and unbelief. The more upright and amiable they appear, the more they injure the cause of God and the souls of men by the weight and influence of their criminal example.—*Dr. Emmons: Works,* vol. v. pp. 458–469.

The immediate effect of the outpouring of the Spirit, promised in verse 3, will be a general awakening to the claims of religion. When so visited, men think seriously about the soul, eternity, and God. Hitherto their practice may have been at one with the sentiment expressed in the words, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" but, under the influence of the new quickening, the unseen state is felt to be a reality, and the interests of time give way before the urgency of the great hereafter. Such views ripen into *religious devotion, or the soul's consecration to God.*

Touching the nature and method of the surrender and dedication of the soul to God, the prophet's language indicates these things:—

I. The act is strictly personal. "One shall say," "and another shall call himself," "and another shall subscribe with his hand." (α) Men proceed singly in the matter. Repentance, faith, and regeneration and consecration are individual transactions between the creature and the Creator. Into the fellowship of saints many may enter at the same time. The text favours the idea of *concealed* action. In their turning to God, it is common for men to move together. Yet the procedure is no more a collective process than eating and drinking at one table and hour is a collective process. As the servants of the Crown have to take the oath of allegiance one by one, so must the vow of service to the King of kings be, in every case, independently plighted. Each person has to enter into the covenant on his own account.

II. The act is performed specially by the faculty of choice and determination. The other mental powers share in the engagement. The understanding and reason, the conscience and the affections, are parties to it. But, whilst the sister faculties conduce to and support the pledge, the utterance of the binding promise does not rest with any or all of them. The decision itself pertains to the instrument of choice. The making up of the mind to what is good and holy is pre-eminently the function and act of the *will.* "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power"

III. The act, in order to be rightly completed, requires an outward sign or seal. The word of acknowledgment is spoken. "I am the Lord's;" or "the name of Jacob" is assumed, the visible fellowship of good men is entered; or a subscription with the hand is appended in token of acceptance and submission. When the soul attaches itself to the service of its Saviour, the internal establishment is to be accompanied by some sort of external work. This is seemly by way of *open confession.* It is right and becoming for the children of God to show whose they are. The sign, too, helps one's own resolution. Our purpose is the stronger when we have definitively committed ourselves to the adopted course. Again, the sign has its effect upon others. Where the decision for Christ is not *avowed,* the example cannot be clear and forcible. The token is a reasonable adjunct, and not to be neglected without loss in various ways. Hence the Scriptures call for the outward profession of faith. Our courage is not to shrink from view. Instead of continuing to come to Christ by night only, Nicodemus must consent to receive baptism with water, and take upon him the badge of open identification with an unpopular cause. The Christian's light is to shine before men. Jesus did not invite to *secret* discipleship (H. E. I. 1042–1045).—*W. Follard.*

(a) "*And another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.*" According to Bishop Louth, this might be rendered, "Another shall inscribe his hand to Jehovah;" or still more plainly in the Septuagint translation, "Another shall write upon his hand, I belong to God." You have doubtless seen upon the hands or arms of seamen the name of the ship in which they have served, rendered indelible by puncture, or by staining; this, perhaps, is one of the oldest customs in the world. The slave, in former days, used thus to be marked with the name of his master; the soldier, of his commander; the idolater, with the name of his god; while one of the Christian fathers tells us that in his day, "many marked their wrists or their arms with the sign of the cross, or with the name of Christ." This, then, will give you a very distinct idea of what the Lord requires of you, and what He will enable you to perform; it is such a decided choice of the Lord for your portion, such an avowal by your daily actions, that you are not your own, but His who has bought you with the price of His precious blood, that all shall know it as certainly, and that your actions shall proclaim it as unequivocally, as if the name of Christ were inscribed on the back of your hand, and could be seen and read in all companies, and on all occasions.—*Blunt.*

I. *The nature of true religion.* 1. It is a surrender of ourselves to God. "I am the Lord's." (1.) He has an original right—formed us for Himself. (2.) Reasonable right. (3.) Redeeming right. 2. It is an avowed acknowledgment of God. "Another shall," &c. Profession is demanded by the Lord. 3. It includes union and fellowship with His people. "Call themselves," &c. So in apostolic times, &c.

II. *The characteristics of the religion as presented in our text.* 1. It is personal. 2. Voluntary. 3. Deliberate. 4. Determinate.

III. *The importance of such a spirit of religion.* 1. It is intensely important to Jesus. 2. To the Church. 3. Supremely important to yourselves; it is not a vain thing, it is your life.—*R. M. M'Cheyne: Sermons on Special Occasions,* pp. 170–173.

The Solitariness and Eternity of God.

xliv. 6. *Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, &c.*

A magnificent text! It places before us three of the loftiest of all themes of thought—the solitariness and eternity of God, and His relations to the Church. There are speculations that are profitless; but others are ennobling. These! About such topics we should often *think;* or the noblest faculties of our mind will dwindle and die (H. E. I. 3294, 3493).

I. The solitariness of God. "Beside Me there is no God." To us a familiar fact; but let us think about it. *One* God! Then—

1. *One Creator of all things.* *All*—what a comprehensive term! Includes—(1.) The *lifeless* universe. The sun—suns. Mountains, gems. The rocks, the waves that roll and dash against them, &c. (2.) The *living* universe. How varied the living forms in this earth, this infinitesimal fragment of the universe! But God is the one source of all the life of the universe, of all its grandeur, of all its beauty. (3.) The *moral* universe. Men. Angels. What a wonderful Being, of whom the outcome is so various and glorious (P. D. 631).

2. *One Sustainer of all things.* The regularity of the procession of the seasons, of all the events of the universe, is a sufficient proof that behind all things there is one God (H. E. I. 362–365, 3173–3182).

3. *One Ruler of all things.* Every departure from the laws of righteousness and love, is not merely an infraction of *law*, but a sin against GOD (H. E. I. 4478).

In all these respects God abides alone, eternally!

II. THE ETERNITY OF GOD. "I am the first, and I am the last." *Space* and *time* the two mysteries before which the human mind stands defeated and appalled. They defy our attempts to grasp them (P. D. 1078). But science has done a noble service by enlarging our ideas of both. Astronomy and geology—what suggestions they are giving concerning the meaning of the word *Time!* But when our thoughts have travelled back as far as is possible, with what do they find themselves confronted? With God! "In the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth" (H. E. I. 2253). Let us travel forward. What a changing universe we are in! The predictions of science concerning the solar system. When they are fulfilled, what will remain unchanged? GOD! With Him there is no variableness (P. D. 2536).

1. This enables us to look forward without foreboding. The one Ruler will overrule all the changes for His glory and the good of His creatures. There is a richer universe ahead (P. D. 1492.)

2. How certain is the fulfilment of the promises of Scripture! He who made them will remain to fulfil them (H. E. I. 2254).

3. What an immense interest *we* have in this truth of the eternity of God! His children shall share in His eternity with Him (Ps. cxxii. 24–28; P. D. 1693, 1971).

III. GOD'S RELATIONS TO HIS CHURCH. In considering them, remember that what He is to His Church He is also to each member of it.

1. He is its *King.* "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel." (1.) Its *ruler.* His will only should be consulted by it. The Church should not fear man nor seek his favour; to GOD only should obedience be rendered. This the inspiring, ennobling principle of the martyrs (Acts iv. 19, 20, v. 29). (2.) Its *defender.* No evil can happen to it (Matt. xvi. 18). The testimony of the past. No fear as to the future (H. E. I. 1246–1251, 2249).

2. He is its *Redeemer.* "And his redeemer the Lord of hosts." "Redeemer," *i.e.*, rescuer. Two modes of rescue, by payment and by power. By payment He has rescued His people from the just claims of the avenging LAW (Matt. xx. 28; 1 Tim. ii. 6; Rom. iii. 24–26; H. E. I. 382). By sanctifying power He will rescue them from the dominion of ignorance and sin (Matt. i. 21). (1.) There are many imperfections *in the Church.* But they shall all be removed (Eph. v. 25–27). His ransomed ones shall form a glorious host with which He shall be "satisfied." (2.) There are many imperfections in *us.* Let us not be dismayed because of them, but let us struggle against them valiantly. In our case, too, God will show that He is the Redeemer of Israel (Phil. i. 6; Jude 24; H. E. I. 1053–1070).

CHRISTIAN COURAGE.

xliv. 8. *Fear not, neither be afraid, &c.*

Boldness for God, and boldness in dealing with God, should form part of the Christian character; and the Word of God, from the beginning to the end, encourages this Christian boldness. We are repeatedly exhorted to "fear not," to "be of good courage."

I. WHY GOD'S PEOPLE ARE LIKELY TO FEAR. 1. Because they are few in number and "peculiar." Many are called, but few are chosen. "Fear not, *little* flock," &c. 2. The result of this is that they have always been a persecuted people (Gen. iv. 29; Isa. xli. 10, 11). 3. Because they are called to live not by sight, but by faith, and therefore to make present sacrifices (Matt. xix. 2–30; Phil. iii. 4–7).

II. WHY THEY SHOULD NOT FEAR. Because the Lord thus argues with us: "Have not I," &c. God challenges man to deny this fact, that He knows the end from the beginning, and has proved that He knows it by foretelling the end from the beginning. (α) This is the manner in which God argues in other passages (Isa. xlii. 9; Deut. xxviii. 47–49; Matt. xxvi. 31). So, again, the Lord has foretold to us everything that is required for our deliverance in the advent and work of Christ (Isa. ix. 6; Zech. xiii. 7; Dan. ix. 26; Isa. liii. 5). These prophecies have been fulfilled to the very letter. Hence, God knows the end; foresees the means, and exercises control over those means. Everything that happens, great or small, is under the control of God, and therefore we have nothing to fear, because we are in His hands who "doeth all things well." In this manner we find the argument used (ch. li. 12).

III. THE PERSONAL APPEAL WHICH THE LORD MAKES TO HIS PEOPLE. "Ye are even my witnesses," thus urging upon them, by the strongest possible personal appeal, to bear testimony to the fact that He is their God for ever and ever. He would have all His people speak of His faithfulness (ch. xliii. 10–13). The duty from which many shrink, from a want of simple courage. Many ways in which we may be witnesses. 1. By a consistent life. Should be a "living epistle." 2. By speaking for the cause of truth and holiness. 3. By zeal for the salvation of souls.

Are you amongst the real witnesses for God?—*M. Villiers, M.A.: The Pulpit*, vol. lxix. pp. 129–134).

(α) See also ver. 7: "And who, as I, shall call," &c. Foreknowledge is the exclusive prerogative of God; it is exemplified in the prophetic history of His people; it extends to things remote as well as near; it supplies a strong argument for unwavering confidence. —*Lyth.*

IDOL-MAKERS.

xliv. 9–20. *They that make a graven image, &c.*

What have we in this section of this chapter? An effective exposure of the folly of a practice that was almost universal! A fact in itself worth thinking about. *We* see the folly of the practice, yet it prevailed without any one suspecting its absurdity! Practical lesson: *Things are not necessarily right because they are common.* True of matters of *faith* and *practice.* Yet there is a general tendency to take it for granted that things that are common are right. A perception of the falsity of this assumption leads some men to an opposite error—the assumption that anything that is ancient is absurd. So pendulum-like is our tendency! But the first of these errors, because it is most prevalent, is most distinctly con-

demned in Scripture. The special aim of Scripture is the cultivation of *individuality*. It teaches that God is to be worshipped with the understanding (Ps. xlvii. 7; Mark xii. 33; 1 Cor. xiv. 15). It commands and commends individual search after truth (John v. 39; Acts xvii. 11). It warns us against idly conforming to common practices (Ex. xxiii. 2). To this aim of Scripture let us respond. Let us have the wisdom and the courage to think and act for ourselves. This is the secret of the origin of the reforms the world needed so much; the absurdity and wickedness of idolatry, witchcraft, Popery, slavery, &c., first dawned upon individual thinkers, who risked their lives in exposing the delusion to others. Thus only can the reforms the world still needs be accomplished. In the very nature of the case, the cultivation of individuality is a duty that devolves on *you* and *me*. Let us give heed to it. This an important lesson from the general purpose of our text. Note also—

I. THINGS EXEMPLARY IN THESE IDOL-MAKERS.

Like our Lord, we should be observant of things that are excellent in men whose general character and course is wrong (Luke xvi. 8). *The idol-makers were not content merely to believe; they carried out their belief into practice.* They believed that they ought to worship idols, and they made and worshipped them. So it is with idolaters to-day. How poorly we should come out, if we were put to this test. We believe many right things: that God should be worshipped, that the Sabbath should be kept holy, &c., but how about our practice? (James i. 22.)

2. *They did not hesitate to make the sacrifices necessary to accomplish the object they deemed desirable.* Many of the idols were exceedingly costly (ch. xl. 19). The poorest stinted themselves that they might at least procure for themselves idols of carved wood (ch. xl. 20). Before the idols they offered costly sacrifices, some of them even their children. What terrible sacrifices idolaters often make now! But *we*, how little we are prepared to sacrifice, in order to do what is right, and to extend the kingdom of God in the world!

II. THINGS ADMONITORY IN THESE IDOL-MAKERS.

When we look upon them thoughtfully, we learn—1. *That intellectual ability is not sufficient to save men from the grossest spiritual follies.* The idolaters were not all idiots. Many of them were great statesmen, soldiers, &c. Yet they were guilty of the gross folly of idolatry. Intellect is a great gift, but there are many things for which it is insufficient. Spiritual things can be only spiritually discerned (1 Cor. i. 21, ii. 14).

2. *That neglect of the duty of thinking leads men into most foolish beliefs and injurious practices* (ver. 19. See also ch. i. 3, and outlines on that text in vol. i. pp. 7–12).

The great lesson of this text: *the duty of diligent and earnest self-examination.* Let us look into our right hand, and see what it is that we are cherishing there (ver. 20; H. E I. 4433, 4434).

THE DECEIVED HEART.

xliv. 20. *He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart, &c.*

The moral government of God in this world is carried on by agencies that, generally speaking, seem to us most perfectly appropriate to the accomplishment of His designs. But He sometimes chooses means that appear unlikely to bring about what He intends to effect. Such was the method He adopted to cure the Jews of their idolatry. They were addicted to it for many generations. He caused them to be carried away captive to a country in which this degradation was practised universally! Yet it was there

they became totally changed in this respect. Considered in itself, there was nothing in their captivity in an idolatrous country to secure this end; indeed it rather had a contrary tendency. But it was the grace of God working with their affliction that rendered it productive of this unexpected result. The warnings and instructions of the prophets accompanied the affliction, and the blessing of God rested on both; while they looked on the idolatrous practices, God's messengers pointed out their absurdity, degradation, and danger. This chapter was designed for this purpose. But while our text refers to the folly of the idolater, it admits of easy and legitimate application to all the fallen children of Adam who are in their unrenewed state. They are turned aside by a deceived heart; they are feeding on ashes; they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

I. THE NATURE OF THAT DECEPTION BY WHICH AN UNCONVERTED PERSON IS INFLUENCED. "A deceived heart hath turned him aside." The deception is therefore—

1. *Fundamental in its character.* It has its seat in the very centre of his being. It perniciously affects his governing principles. Principles determine action. True, bad men will sometimes, through the operation of outward causes, act contrary to their secret inclinations; and a good man, overborne by temptation, may act contrary to his settled principles (Rom. vii. 18, 19). Peter denied his Master at the very time when his principles, if carried out, would have led him to come forward in His defence. But deception of the heart consists not merely in having the principles overruled by the force of temptation, but in the principles themselves being wrong. In this case, the very springs of a man's action are out of place, and consequently wrong must be the rule by which he walks and the judgment which he forms. When the fountain is corrupt, all the streams that issue from it will be corrupt. When the heart is in error, all that depends upon its unaided decisions must be erroneous (Prov. iv. 23; H. E. I. 2689–2693).

2. *It is powerful in the influence which it exerts.* Whether a man will walk in the paths of virtue or of vice, depends entirely on the state of his heart, for in all cases it is true that "as he thinketh in his heart so is he." His conduct will sooner or later be of the character to which that inclines. Such is the influence of the heart over the inferior faculties that, whatever resistance they may set up at first, it will be but feeble and temporary. There are instances on record—even in regard to good men, as David in the matter of Uriah, and Peter in denying Christ—in which the inferior faculties, not being fully subject to the heart, have, like a factious colony, revolted; but the heart, being right and strong, has exerted its sovereign power, and they have been again reduced to subjection, order, and obedience. On the other hand, in hypocrites and persons partially awakened, the inferior powers have been wrought upon to a great extent; but the heart not being changed, they have soon drawn back to its government and control. The intellect is curiously affected by the heart. How much the heart has to do with the opinions we hold! With what ease a person is brought to believe that to which he is inclined! (P. D. 119, 2382, 3057). How apt the judgment is to protest against that to which the heart is opposed! Such was the powerful influence by which the Jews, in the days of the Prophet, were retained in their idolatrous practices. It was seen to be equally efficacious in the days of our Lord. The corrupt hearts of the Pharisees were averse to His claims, and their aversion influenced their wills to reject and destroy Him; if at any time they found conviction stealing over them, it was met within by a powerful check. They saw, and yet they hated, both our Lord and His Father.

3. *The existence of this deception is usually unsuspected, because it is so natu-*

ral and easy in its mode of operation. Amongst all the reasons assigned for indifference about the state of the soul in the sight of God, this is not the least frequently assigned, that the mind is now at ease. Most persons think that nothing but fanatical zeal can make a man anxiously concerned for himself, or induce him deliberately to awaken suspicion in the reposing souls of others. But there is a quietness which deserves to be dreaded more than the greatest distress that can be experienced. It is the quietness of spiritual death—a false peace arising from the spiritual ignorance of its possessors, or the delusion of others by whom they are led (Jer. vi. 14; H. E. I. 1327–1333). Though conversions are not all after one pattern, yet there are few whose present spiritual comfort, if it be worth anything, has not been preceded by a severe spiritual conflict.

What is required of every one who would avoid the delusion specified in our text? It is that he should act with regard to the momentous concerns of the soul as he does in reference to the interests of the present life. When a man is about to purchase an estate, he most carefully examines the title to it that is offered him. But how seldom are the Scriptures searched for the express purpose of bringing the heart to that test! But consider—

II. THE PROOFS OF THIS DECEPTION WHICH ARE TO BE FOUND IN THE SINNER'S LIFE AND CONDUCT. "He feedeth on ashes." A deceived heart is known—

1. *By the vitiated taste which characterises its possessor*—by the utter insufficiency and impropriety of those things by which he, as an immortal being, seeks to satisfy the desires of his spiritual nature; just as, when we see a person craving after that which cannot be of any benefit to him, we conclude at once that there is a diseased condition of body, or a perverted state of mind. Only in God can there be found the satisfaction for the soul's craving after happiness (H. E. I. 2379–2387, 4627–4630). But instead of looking to Him, the man of deceived heart endeavours to supply His place with inefficient substitutes—the things of this world. "He feedeth on ashes," sensual enjoyments, schemes of worldly pleasure, delusive hopes (P. D. 1680).

2. *By the injurious tendencies of the man's practices.* He who "feedeth on ashes" not only debars himself of what is good, but also inflicts upon his constitution a positive evil, by rendering himself incapable of relishing necessary future good when he may feel disposed for its enjoyment. As true of the soul as of the body! The longer repentance is delayed the more difficult it becomes; the longer vice reigns in the heart, the more arduous and painful is the work of its expulsion. (α) "Feeding on ashes" must also affect the future. That there are degrees of glory we are clearly taught in the Scriptures; but by what rule are they regulated except by the measure of grace received and cultivated here? (P. D. 412, 1752).

3. *It is seen in that contentment and satisfaction the man appears to possess.* "He *feedeth* on ashes." He does not take them as a medicine that has been prescribed for him; he sits down to them as a meal, as a matter of habit and choice! How pitiable!

III. THE DIREFUL EFFECTS OF THIS PRACTICE ON THE SINNER. "He cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" If the body be diseased in some of its inferior or less essential parts, the vital organs being healthy and the constitution good, it may recover itself, and again perform its wonted actions; but if the seat of life be affected, there is no hope of recovery but by a miracle, or that which nearly approaches to it. It is just so with a deceived heart. Sin has untuned the instrument, and though it has still left the strings, they have no power to rectify themselves. In a dead body there are all the properties for action, and there may be some of the animal warmth, while there is no animation, but the lifeless mass cannot recover itself. No more can the man who has long fed upon

"ashes." The very desire, as well as the ability, to raise to a nobler life passes away from him (H. E. I. 1527). —*James Slye: Home Exercises*, pp. 33–66.

(a) To which of the saints can we turn who did not enlist under the banner of the Cross until late in life, and after a terrible course of error and profanity, who does not find, to his deep regret, that in the time of his former ignorance he was not only keeping himself from the proper nourishment of his soul, but also that the ashes on which he then fed have left behind injurious consequences, which now prevent him from enjoying so much as he otherwise would of the excellency of Christ and His Gospel! When the memory has been previously stored, and perhaps at a very early period of life, with the pernicious productions of a licentious press, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to forget them, and supply their place with better things. When the affections have been firmly set on the vanities of time and sense, and through a long period have exercised their strength upon a certain set of objects, it will be extremely difficult to prevent the intrusion of those objects; and that, too, when they ought especially to be annihilated. Many and painful will be the struggles between these and better things for the throne of the heart.—*Slye.*

Mistaken notions of image-worship may lead us to regard it with an air of scorn, as too silly and infatuated ever to find a place in Christianised communities; but let us not be deceived; the pagan does not bow down to the mere material of which his god is formed; he believes it to be fraught with a divine power and intelligence, that in it or in his act of worship there resides a secret virtue; and whenever the symbol in Christian worship is believed to have in itself an efficacious virtue, whenever religious acts as such, religious ceremonies or places of worship, are supposed to be possessed of a peculiar sacredness and saving efficacy, we have only a refined species of image-worship. But if not images, we have our idols in abundance. The gods of our day may not have an outward embodiment, but not the less loyal are their votaries to them. Men are prone to make idols of mammon and worldly desires and selfish ambitions. Human nature is substantially the same in all ages. The follies of bygone times are continuelly being reproduced, and instead of exciting our ridicule, they should call us to examine our own conduct.

The text concludes the Prophet's scathing exposure of the folly of idol-manufacture and idol-worship, which he traces up to "a deceived heart." "So wrapped up is he in his delusion that he never thinks of examining the grounds of his hope." May not this explain every false confidence, and every sinful course? As the long practice of idolatry blinds the idolater to its folly, so every sin and superstitious trust has a blinding effect. The lie in the hand becomes a lie in the heart, and the lie in the heart keeps the lie in the hand. Practice and belief have a reciprocal influence. Self-deception is at once the fruit and the seed of sin (H. E. I. 4538). Sin works spiritual blindness, so that the sinner is like a ship in a fog, or a traveller in a deep ravine who knows not his direction on account of the overhanging cliffs and dense foliage (Matt. vi. 23); nay, he is worse, for not only is he unable to review his conduct and test his principles, he is indisposed to do so, and it never even suggests itself to him that he is possibly on a wrong track. Look at some of the causes and forms of self-delusion in regard to a sinful life and a foolish confidence, both of which are denoted by "the hand," as that which acts and that which grasps:—

I. *Ignorance of self and neglect of self-scrutiny.* Men busy themselves in exploring the expanse of the sky, and ranging the bodies of the universe, while they neglect to scrutinise their own hearts. They recoil from self-examination because it is painful. "O grievous strait!" cries one; "if I look into myself I cannot endure myself; if I see not myself I am deceived, and death is unavoidable." Surely it is better to open the wound than to let it mortify. If only the sinner would pause and reflect, he might discover the lie to which he is clinging and the deception that lurks in his heart (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24).

2. *The false religions of the world.* Even the heathen have a sense of guilt and a fear of retribution, and when they ask, "How can we obtain pardon and peace?" their own hearts cannot tell, nature gives no response; but the superstitions of the world come to their aid with soothing opiates for a guilty conscience. They are taught to propitiate the gods by bloody rites. So strong is the sense of guilt that the deluded Hindoo practises upon himself every form of torture, prostrating himself before the wheels of the car of Juggernaut. The Mohammedan is very scrupulous in his fasts and prayers, or undertakes a toilsome journey to the tomb of the false prophet, hoping thus to expiate his guilt and obtain a passport to paradise. The Romanist confesses his sin into the ear of a priest, and implores the aid of the Virgin and the saints. The indulgences which he can purchase are paper falsehoods, but so deluded is he that he does not ask, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" In these ways the false religions of the world encourage their votaries in sin and self-deception. All of them are offshoots and creations of depraved human nature (Deut. xxix. 19).

3. *The practice of giving soft and soothing names to sin to disguise its real nature.* The lie in the hand is concealed by the lie in the heart, when plausible names are given to dishonourable actions. A man who ruins himself by some degrading vice is said to be "a good-hearted fellow, who harms no one but himself;" a shameful sin is but "a misfortune." Thus are men led into the belief that there is no such thing as sin at all. They hide their eyes from its sinfulness, and live in the practice of it, because they think lightly of it.

4. *The excuses of our own evil hearts* (Jer. xvii. 9). In ancient times men ascribed their moral delinquencies to the influence of the stars under which they were born, casting their guilt upon the circumstances of their birth, and imagining that they were under a fatal influence which compelled them to sin (Jer. vii. 10). Many still believe themselves to be the slaves of inflexible fate, and are bold enough to charge their Maker with their guilt, like Burns, who wrote—

> "Thou knowest that Thou hast formed me
> With passions wild and strong;
> And listening to their witching voice
> Has often led me wrong."

They declare themselves to be the victims of circumstance, unable to help themselves (Gen. iii. 12; Jas. i. 13).

CONCLUSION. — 1. *The degradation and disappointment of the self-deceived.* "He feedeth on ashes," which cannot nourish nor satisfy (Deut. xxxii. 32; Luke xv. 16). No solid comfort nor abiding peace is found in the lies to which the natural heart has recourse. Foolish man is like the ostrich that tries to elude the pursuit of the hunters by hiding its head in the sand. Lies in heart and life shall have lies for their reward—ashes instead of food. In Doddridge's well-known hymn, "O Happy Day," there is a reference to our text, which in some collections has been tampered with. The verse runs—

> "Now rest, my long-divided heart;
> Fixed on this blissful centre, rest:
> With ashes who would grudge to part,
> When called on angels' bread to feast!"

2. *The helplessness of the self-deluded.* "He cannot deliver his soul" by detecting the delusions in which he is ensnared. Nothing short of Divine power and heavenly light can break the spell under which he lies (John xvi. 8–11; Eph. v. 13, 14).—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

THE BLESSEDNESS AND DUTY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

xliv. 21, 22. *Remember these, O Jacob and Israel, &c.*

God contrasts the happy condition of His chosen people with that of the poor blind idolaters whom He had been describing in the verses before

I. All who have come to Christ are forgiven (ver. 22). 1. *The completeness of their forgiveness.* Shown in many ways in the Bible (H. E. I. 2332–2337). 2. *It is present forgiveness.* "I have." Some say, "I hope, &c.; I don't know, &c.; It is impossible to tell, &c." 3. *It is Divine.* (1.) Some try to blot out their own sins. (2.) Some hope that Christ will blot out their sins. Speak to unforgiven souls.

II. All that have come to Christ are God's servants. Two reasons are given: 1. Because redeemed. 2. Because formed by God.

III. Souls in Christ shall not be forgotten of God. His children often think He has forgotten them.

1. So it was with Moses in the land of Midian.

2. So it was with David (Ps. lxxvii., xiii., xxi.)

3. So it was with Hezekiah when God told him he must die (Isa. xxxviii. 14). But God said, "I have heard thy prayer," &c.

4. So shall it be with God's ancient people (Isa. xlix. 14, 15).

5. So it is in the text. The world may forget thee—thy friends, &c. Yet "thou shalt not be forgotten of me." The Lord cannot forget you.

IV. A redeemed soul should return unto God. The sin and misery of every natural soul is in going away from God. 1. Come into the arms of His love. 2. Come into communion with Him. 3. To the backslider. You have done worse than the world, yet He says, "Return," &c. — *R. M. M'Cheyne: Sermons and Lectures*, pp. 60–65.

God's Remembrance of Israel.

xliv. 21. *O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me.*

1. This promise was addressed, literally and primarily, to the natural descendants of Jacob: a people whom Jehovah had deigned to call into special relation with Himself, and whom He had distinguished by various privileges from all other nations of the earth. But we are abundantly warranted in extending it also to the Christian Church, the spiritual Israel, of which the literal Israel was an instructive type (cf. Ex. xix. 5, 6, and 1 Pet. ii. 9, 10). It belongs also to every individual believer in Jesus, as a lively member of that body.

2. More is intended in this declaration than is expressed. "Thou shalt not be forgotten of me;" that is, I will not overlook thy interests, or neglect thy welfare, or withhold anything that will promote thy real and permanent advantage (ch. xlix. 13–16).

I. Consider this promise as it applies to the ancient Jewish Church. The literal posterity of Jacob were separated from all other nations by a covenant which conferred on them peculiar privileges. But they proved themselves "a foolish people and unwise," by the manner in which they requited His love. As a just expression of His displeasure, He had determined that they should be carried away into captivity at Babylon (ch. xlii. 22–25, xliii. 27, 28). But the prophetic denunciations of chastisement and desolation were coupled with assurances of fatherly regard, and with promises of ultimate deliverance. Even among this degenerate people there were some truly pious individuals who mourned over the iniquities of their countrymen and trembled at God's word. For their support and encouragement Isaiah subjoins to the threatenings he has delivered the comfortable words of our text. To the righteous individuals of the community it gave a pledge that it should be well with *them* at all times and in all circumstances; and it also conveyed an assurance that in due time the collective Israel should be released from captivity, brought home again, and indulged with another period of national trial (chap. xliv. 22, 24, 26–28). The accomplishment of these

gracious promises in the actual return from Babylon is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Though the national independency and prosperity of the Jews suffered occasional suspension and decline, yet they were not finally scattered till the measure of their iniquities was filled up by their murder of the Messiah, and their obstinate rejection of the glorious gospel. Then wrath came upon them to the uttermost (P. D. 2063, 2080, 2082). But, low and degraded as is their present situation, God can yet lift them up. Israel is not yet totally forgotten of God. He remembers His ancient covenant with Abraham His friend. These natural branches, at present cut off and rejected, will be grafted again into their own olive-tree.

II. **Consider the promise of our text as it applies to the Christian Church of the present age.** God's Church at large is not and cannot be forgotten of Him. Many have been her afflictions and persecutions, but out of them all He hath delivered her. The attacks of her enemies He has over-ruled for her ultimate increase and establishment. Many are the promises given for her encouragement. They may be arranged under four general classes:—

1. He has promised at all times to afford to His Church the means of grace, and to give His blessing with the means (Isa. xxx. 20, 21; Jer. iii. 15; Isa. xii. 3, xlviii. 17; Matt. xviii. 20.)

2. He has promised to His Church a great increase of her internal purity, tranquillity, and glory (Isa. xi. 9, lxv. 25, xi. 13, lx. 21; Zech. xiv. 20; Isa. xxxii. 15, iv. 5).

3. Another class of promises relates to the external peace and victory which God has destined His Church to enjoy in the latter days (Isa. xli. 11). The prophetical part of the Book of Revelation is sublimely explicit in its declaration on this head.

4. A fourth class relates to the future enlargement and extension of the Church (Isa. ii. 2, xlix. 6; Zech. xiv. 9; Mal. i. 11).

These promises are an ample comment on the more general and laconic declaration of our text. God is now in the very act of accomplishing these gracious engagements. The interests of the Church are safe, for they are in the hands of God. The cause which lies so near *your* hearts occupies a distinguished place in *His*. Tremble not for the ark of God (H. E. I. 1246–1251; P. D. 518).

III. **Consider the import of the text in its application to individual Christians.** What the Lord says of His Church at large He says to every member of it in particular. Only ascertain your right to the character of "an Israelite indeed," and then you will also have ascertained your right to be comforted by the assurance that you shall not be forgotten of God.

1. He will not forget those circumstances in your situation which may at any time render necessary His special help and interference. Trust in Him *always* (H. E. I. 4049–4053).

2. He will not forget the intimate and endearing relations which He bears toward you, nor the claims which these relationships give you on His friendship. He will not forget that He is your Creator, your Redeemer, your God in covenant.

3. He will not forget "the exceeding great and precious promises" by which He is explicitly pledged to help and save you. *Men* often forget their promises, but *God* never!

4. He will not forget your prayers. They are all duly filed and registered, ready to be answered in that time, in that way, which will be most for your good and so for His glory (H. E. I. 3884–3886). What a blessed counteraction of those uneasy apprehensions as to our future lot and circumstances, which we are too prone to indulge. We may apply the same consideration as an antidote to our natural dread of dying. Many sincere Christians, though not afraid of what shall be *after death*, feel considerable apprehension as to the act of dying. They shrink from the prospect of dissolving agonies and parting pangs. But you

have unbosomed your feelings and fears on this subject before the Throne. Your prayers will surely be answered to your soul's comfort when your appointed time shall come (H. E. I. 1642, 1643).

5. God will not forget to confer upon you, if faithful unto death, the reward of glory. He will not forget your services in His righteous cause, your active zeal in doing His will, your patient resignation in suffering it (Heb. vi. 10; Matt. x. 42; Gal. vi. 7, 8; Matt. v. 12, xxv. 23, 34–40). THEREFORE, 1 Cor. xv. 58.—*Jabez Bunting, D.D.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 438–452.

I. THE EXPERIENCE HERE ADDRESSED. It is that of a soul in doubt of God's goodness and faithfulness. Few, if any, of God's people go through life without knowing something of this state of mind (cf. ch. xlix. 14; Ps. lxxvii. 7–9).

1. *We may feel thus when God is less in our thoughts than is our wont.* It very often happens that we attribute to the want of thoughtfulness in a friend what is really due to nothing more nor less than our own forgetfulness of him; and so when we are tempted to think less of God, we fancy He has forgotten us.

2. *We may feel thus when we are less active than is our wont in Christ's service.* Work for God keeps the sense of His presence and sympathy alive and strong. When we diminish aught of our work, or do it with less intensity of feeling, we suffer a corresponding loss of God's presence and favour, &c.

3. *When we are unusually tried and afflicted.* We find it hard always to persuade ourselves this does not mean a distant, if not an angry God. It is only when sunshine returns that we are able to see love and chastening hand in hand.

4. *When our prayers seem unanswered.* Nothing so helps the feeling that God has forgotten us as delayed answers to prayer, &c.

5. *When we lack the signs of prosperity in our work for Christ.* Some natures are exceedingly sensitive on this point, and when the harvest is long coming we think ourselves forgotten, &c.

II. THE PROMISE HERE GIVEN. "O Israel," &c. Every promise is based on the promiser. This is God's word to His people.

1. *He will not forget our persons.* We are not known before God in the aggregate, but as individuals (ch. xlix. 16). He knew what house and street Peter was in at Joppa. He will not forget our persons.

2. *He will not forget our prayers.* If not what we ask, He will give us an equivalent good.

3. *He will not forget His work in us.*

4. *He will not forget our work for Him.*

Some reasons for thus speaking: 1. His nature will not allow Him to forget us. 2. Nor His promises. 3. Nor His redeeming work in Christ. 4. Nor His honour (see vol. i. p. 267).

CONCLUSION: 1. *We forget God.* Let this promise rebuke us. 2. *When we think God forgets us*, let this promise encourage us.—*James Hoyle: The Study and Homiletic Monthly*, vol. iv. new series, pp. 231, 232.

The bane of friendship, the canker worm of human life, is suspicion and distrust. Confidence in the character and reliance upon the attachment of those we love form principal ingredients in the cup of human happiness; if these be withdrawn, affection has no resting-place. Every one wishes for some firm object on which he may repose his confidence; a mind endued with any portion of proper sensibility feels equal pain at distrusting or being distrusted. Mutual good faith is the cement of society,—the bond which binds man to man (H. E. I. 1882–1888). A willingness to confide, where no cause for hesitation or demur can reasonably be presumed to exist, is a characteristic of a noble mind; a readiness to distrust without sufficient reason marks an uncertain and unstable character.

As suspicion is the bane of human friendship, unbelief is the destruction

of religious hope. It is equally dishonourable to God and injurious to ourselves. To guard us against distrust, in regard to God's providence and grace, is one great design of Holy Scripture. For this purpose God mercifully gives us such promises and assurances as our text.

I. WHAT THIS PROMISE SUPPOSES.

When God says to us, "Thou shalt not be forgotten of Me," it is implied, 1. *That we set a high value upon God's gracious remembrance.* The wicked deem it no sorrow to be forgotten of God; He is not in all their thoughts, and they have no wish to have any share in His. But those who are born of God attach great importance to His gracious remembrance of them; they know it secures happiness in all circumstances, victory over all enemies, support under all trials, a saving interest in all spiritual blessings (Ps. xxv. 7, cvi. 4, &c.)

2. *That we have some apprehensions that it is not extended to us.* Thus it was with Israel, and with some apparent reason. Thus it is with ourselves when the promise is very long delayed (ch. xlix. 14); when Providences wear a frowning aspect (Ps. xxxi. 12); when conscience is awake to the number and aggravation of our offences; when our enemies appear to triumph over us (Ps. lxxiv. 10, 22, 23); when our religious state is after all doubtful; when we experience a sensible decline of consolation (Ps. lxxvii. 9).

3. *That God is concerned, not only for the safety, but also for the happiness of His people.* He anticipates the objection, and answers it. He loves to see the harp taken down. You may be forgotten by your dearest earthly friends; many unexpected things happen (Gen. xl. 23; Jer. ii. 32; Isa. xlix. 15), but God will never forget His people, nor leave them long under the delusion that He has forsaken them.

II. ON WHAT GROUND DOES THIS PROMISE REST?

Anxiety would be becoming if the fact were doubtful. Some anxieties concerning men are reasonable; some of the "securities" they put into our hands are worthless. But in this promise we should trust unfalteringly, for it rests—

1. *On a perfection that cannot be tarnished.* Remember who is the speaker; Him in whom all perfections centre as their birthplace, their residence, their home.

2. *On a covenant that cannot be broken.* The covenant of grace made with Christ is immutable (2 Cor. i. 20).

3. *On a relationship that cannot be destroyed.* The union that subsists between Christ and believers is the great guarantee of its fulfilment: "I in them."

Besides, we have for our encouragement unimpeachable records of the manner in which God has dealt with His other promises to His people (1 Kings viii. 56).

III. WHAT CORRESPONDING FEELINGS IT DEMANDS.

1. Confidence.

2. Gratitude, which manifests itself in loving remembrance of all His loving-kindness to us, and in cheerful obedience to all His commandments. —*Samuel Thodey.*

SIN AND MERCY.

xliv. 22. *I have blotted out, &c.*

There are some representations of the character of God which strike us, when we think of them, only with awe. But there are others infinitely more tender and consoling. Such are the contemplations suggested by this passage.

I. There is *the thought of sin.* The individuals to whom these words were originally addressed were guilty of crimes of great enormity and aggravation, crimes that had gathered themselves up until they were black and dense as a thick cloud (Isa. i. 2–15). But, passing from this particular case to the general application, the s—

stance of these terms applies to us all. "Who can say, I have made my heart clean; I am pure from sin?" Sin is everywhere (Rom. v. 12). By pseudo-philosophers and benevolent idealists this doctrine is deemed unpopular and repulsive, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. This fancied exemption from the ruin of the Fall, this clinging to the unaided perfectibility of human nature, is a dangerous error, and must be confronted and exposed. "Man goeth astray even from the womb, and every imagination of the heart is only evil continually." The gospel proceeds upon the basis of universal depravity, which is so repulsive to human pride. The Scriptures recognise only two varieties of condition. There may be the purest and most beautiful morality without godliness (John v. 42). The true minister of Christ must set forth the personal guilt and danger of every member of his charge. There is sin—sin as a cloud, and as a thick cloud.

II. If that were all, this would be a melancholy message; but I now come to the second thought—*there is mercy.* It might seem strange, and it does seem strange, that after this declaration of apostacy and of impenitence the prophet should not have gone away after pronouncing sentence of doom—gone away without leaving any hope of mercy. Premising that this method of reconciliation must provide somehow for the purity of God, and of the vindication of the honour of His throne, and that all that has come about by the atonement of Jesus, we proceed to observe—

1. *That the character of God, as the God of mercy, is the great Bible theme.* The whole tale of the Bible is a tale of grace. The last words of the Bible are words of grace (Rev. xxii. 17). Grace is everywhere (Rom. v. 18). This gift of grace was not known in the world until the entrance of sin. There had been many attributes of God before; but grace was, so to speak, a new idea, a new fountain struck out of the heart of the Deity. There was no room for grace in a universe where there was no room for sin; but when sin came into the world, grace came into the world. This was the first stoop of the Divinity. "God can be just, and yet," &c., Christ died for you all.

2. Look at *the sufficiency with which the salvation is invested.* As aggravated as your sins have been, so abundant is the mercy of the Lord. Men do not sin and finally perish because they are appointed thereunto by an irreversible decree of God. There can be no responsibility where there is no power. There is no barrier to your own present and eternal salvation except the barrier which your own hands have piled. There is mercy for you. Search the Bible through from the beginning to the end, you find frequent, explicit, and continual declarations of mercy. If you are a sinner, not all the morbid ingenuity of human unbelief, and not all the sophistry of the old demon of the pit, can prevent you from entering, if you will, into the charter of liberty wherewith Christ waits to make His people free. You may tell your own tale if you will, I do not care. "Let the wicked," &c. There is mercy for all, mercy for you.—*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.: Penny Pulpit.*

Forgiveness a Present Mercy.

xliv. 22. *I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, &c.*

I. The prophet's simile. Our sins may well be likened unto clouds, as to, 1. *Their number.* Who can count the clouds which chase each other across the winter sky? And has not one of the holiest men who ever lived left upon record the humiliating confession that his sins were not less numerous (Ps. xl. 12). 2. *Their nature.* The clouds are all exhalations from the land and sea, the earthly portion of the universe, and our sins are all the

produce of our corrupt and earthly nature; they all ascend out of the soil of the natural heart (Matt. xv. 19). 3. *Their effects.* The clouds shut out from us the sun's clear and shining light and the bright blue sky, and when they greatly thicken they augur storms and tempests; so our sins, &c. 4. *Their situation.* The clouds are hung out in mid-heaven, high above our heads, and although it appears the simplest thing in nature to dissolve and dissipate them, for ofttimes while we look the rays of the sun are melting them away, so that the figure which we have just delighted to trace in them is, even while we gaze, changed, and loosened, and scattered, and then gone for ever, yet they are so placed that, weak and transient as they are, not all the efforts of all the men that ever dwelt upon the wide world's surface could avail to blot one cloud out of existence. So is it with our sins. Man may punish sin, but he cannot pardon it; he may pardon the *crime*, that is, the portion of a transgression which affects himself, but he can never pardon the *sin*. No man can dissipate the smallest sin that hangs between us and our Maker. There is but one Being in the universe who can do this, "*I*, even *I*," &c.

II. THE PROPHET'S DOCTRINE: that forgiveness is a present mercy. "I *have* blotted out," &c. The idea of blotting out a cloud seems to be an allusion to that dissolving of these vapours which is continually taking place in the atmosphere, when the heat of the summer sun draws up the moisture of the cloud, and renders it completely invisible. As completely does God dissipate the sins of the believing penitent. It is as impossible to bring them forth again to judgment as it would be to reconstruct the clouds, with all their varied shapes and hues and tints which we looked upon last summer, and which never outlived the day we gazed upon them. Blessed consideration for the souls of God's believing and pardoned people. It is the teaching of Scripture, not that God will forgive the penitent at the day of judgment, nor even in the hour of death, but in the very moment that they turn to Him. The forgiveness which He bestows is full and free, and it is bestowed at once and for ever. The Scriptures abound with instances of men who could rejoice in a present pardon (2 Sam. xii. 13; Isa. vi. 7, xxxviii. 17; Matt. ix. 2; Eph. iv. 32; 1 John ii. 12; Ps. xxxii. 1, 2).

III. THE DIVINE ARGUMENT. "I *have* blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: *return unto Me*, for I *have* redeemed thee." God's method of dealing with His fallen and rebellious creatures is the very reverse of what we would naturally expect. The great argument which He employs to bring them back to Himself is, not what He will do for them, but what He *has* done for them (Rom. v. 8, xii. 1; 2 Cor. v. 18–21). So here, He does not encourage the penitent by telling them that if they attain to a sufficiently deep and poignant repentance He will forgive them, but by assuring them that they are already forgiven; that in the very first moment when sorrow for sin sprang up within them, He blotted out their sins. Surely this argument should prevail to turn us from our iniquities, to encourage us to accept the offers of Divine mercy, and to begin to serve God with that holy devotedness which can be inspired only by grateful love.

Lastly, if we yield to this Divine argument, and grasp firmly the prophet's doctrine, the firmament that bends above us will speak to us evermore of the abounding grace of God. If in the clouds that pass over it we behold symbols of our many, our daily, our dark, our desperate sins, the blue vault of heaven through which they sail will speak to us still more eloquently of the Divine mercy—immeasurable in height, and length, and depth, and breadth, all infinite in love. Sinner as I am, why should I despond? why should I fear? why should I for a moment doubt? As easy that one vast cloud should shroud both hemispheres, should shut out for ever sun,

moon, and stars, as that my sins, however great, however numerous, should surpass in magnitude God's pardoning love, that abounding grace, that infinite forgiveness which is treasured up for me in Christ Jesus my Lord.—*H. Blunt, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 22–39.

Sin and iniquity are represented here under the figure of clouds. True, in some respects they are not like clouds. Clouds do good service. They are reservoirs to store up the excessive moisture of the earth, and in due season to return it to the earth for refreshment and fertility (Ps. lxv. ii.) They serve as conductors of the electric fluid from one part of heaven to another. They are sometimes welcome as screens to moderate the excessive heat of a burning sun. But sin and iniquity produce nothing but evil; no good either to man's interest or happiness. Yet there are points of resemblance between clouds and human sin. Clouds veil the sun, and sins hide from us the face of God, and darken our view of heaven. Clouds narrow our prospect, and sin prevents us from looking clearly and cheerfully into the great future world, blinding us to everything except the lower things in the world that now is. Clouds, when they are fully charged, bring down the fury of the storm; and sin, when it is finished, brings upon the sinner the tempest of God's righteous anger, in full and just retribution for every evil word and deed. Lastly, clouds are quite beyond our control; *the power to disperse cloud, or blot out sin, rests with God alone.*

1. Carefully consider this last point of likeness. God removes the clouds, and He alone. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." Man can make many changes and removals; in the physical world in which he lives, in the world of humanity of which he forms part. But not one sin can he blot out. God has reserved to Himself that power and and prerogative: (1.) Because the dispensing of pardon is too precious to be entrusted either to men or angels. Not having the power of omniscience to read the heart, they might not dispense it wisely. What mistakes they might make! (2.) All sin, whoever may be injured by it, is ultimately against God (H. E. I. 4480). Therefore all punishment is in His hands, and the dispensation of pardon is His prerogative.

2. It is a great thing we do when we ask Him to exercise it on our behalf. This appears when we consider a further point of likeness between wickedness and clouds. Clouds are used in Bible language to express a vast number (Heb. xii. 1; Isa. lx. 8). Can we deny that in this respect this figure is sadly applicable to us? How terribly all our life long—every day!—our sins have been massing themselves into thick clouds, which are only awaiting the word to come down in the storms of retribution (Ps. xi. 6).

3. For some God has done this great thing. To them He has said plainly, "I have blotted out," &c. To whom has He said this? To those who have obeyed the latter part of the text: "Return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee." These have found that God has provided a full and perfect redemption. Clouds, be they ever so thick, ever so fully charged with the wrath of future punishment, are blotted out: and the forgiven soul stands before God, and looks up into the cloudless sky of His love.

4. For any one whose conscience is not stone-dead, such a change as this must appear of all things most desirable and full of blessing. It is so, but it can never be yours, until you get rid of that thick cloud of unrepented, unforgiven sin which always abides between you and the Father of Mercies. How to get rid of it you know.

5. The sins which form that cloud are yours—"Thy sins, thy transgressions." You cannot shift them from your own shoulders to some one else; they belong to you, and you only. You may shut your eyes to them: but there they are, like a heavy cloud. You can no more drive them away

than you can disperse it. You may try so to colour this or that evil deed as to give it a better look; just as the thunder-cloud sometimes gets touched by a transient light, till the skirts of the terrible thing look bright with crimson and gold. But it is a terrible thing, in spite of all that fleeting brightness which does not belong to it. God looks through all the gay colouring you would lay upon your sins, and sees them as they are. They are the cause of your separation from Him now, and will be the cause of your separation from Him in eternity, if they be not blotted out while you are on this side of the grave.—*Edward Baines, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 13–25.

What becomes of the believer's sins?

1. They are *forgiven* (Eph. iv. 32; 1 John ii. 12).

2. *Not to be even mentioned unto him* (Ezek. xxxiii. 16).

3. *Blotted out* ("I have blotted out," &c., and chap. xliii. 25).

4. *Covered* (Ps. lxxxv. 2; Ps xxxii. 1).

5. *Removed* (Ps. ciii. 12).

6. *Cast into the sea* (Micah vii. 19).

7. *Hid* (Hos. xiii. 12).

8. *Behind God's back* (Isa. xxxviii. 17, see vol. i. p. 438).

9. *Forgotten* (Isa. xliii. 25; Heb. 10, 17).

Believer, ponder these precious figures. If they do not teach *full perfect, complete,* and *present* salvation what language can teach it?

CONCLUSION: Isa. i. 18. — *Bible Readings, edited by Briggs & Elliott.*

A CALL FOR UNIVERSAL PRAISE.

xliv. 23. *Sing, O ye heavens, for the* LORD *hath done it, &c.*

The prophet, beholding Israel's redemption achieved and the people restored to their land and privileges, exulted in the blessed change, and burst forth in this impassioned address to all nature above and around him, and lest it should be supposed that his transport was premature, and that he had anticipated more than could reasonably be expected, Jehovah resumes the discourse and names the man whom He had destined to be His people's deliverer (ver. 28). It is natural to ask, Was the deliverance of the Jews so great, so blissful, so universally interesting as to justify the prophet's rapturous call? In reply, we observe that the Jews exclusively were the Church of the living God, and their restoration was necessary to the accomplishment of the predictions concerning the Messiah. It was a shadow and pledge of the spiritual and eternal redemption which He was to obtain. The primary subject is the liberation of the captive Jews, but that speedily merges in a more glorious theme.

I. **The work which it is here said God hath performed.** This work, though then future and still only in progress, is spoken of as already effected. The purpose of God renders its completion absolutely certain.

1. *The nature and extent of that deliverance with which the Israel of God are blessed.* It is not only redemption from evil but redemption to God, and includes the restoration of His image to our souls. We are only yet beginning to enjoy these high privileges. Where is the man who can sufficiently appreciate the magnitude and blessedness of that change which takes place in the relations, character, and prospects of a sinner when he passes from darkness to light,—from life to death,—from bondage to freedom? Every scene around him seems now to smile upon him,—to speak to him of the goodness and greatness of his divine Benefactor, and animates his gratitude and praise. The names "Jacob" and "Israel" designate all who prove themselves Israelites indeed. What a multitude of all ages, countries, characters, and conditions this name embraces!

2. *The display of the divine glory in*

this redemption. Who but a Being of boundless benevolence, wisdom, and power could have conceived and accomplished it? It delights Him to be known and acknowledged as its Author. How did He effect this redemption? It is the result of His Son's sacrifice in our nature (Heb. ix. 11, 12). "It is finished;" the work is done (Ps. xxii. 31), and in it God "has glorified Himself" (Ps. lxxxv. 10). — Consider, further, that God Himself is the source and sum of all the good which this redemption comprises. What must be the fulness of His knowledge and wisdom who irradiates so many minds; of His love who feeds this celestial flame in so many hearts; and of His blessedness who gladdens and delights so many immortal creatures?—Further, think of the means He employs for putting His people in possession of this redemption. Among these, the word and the ministry of reconciliation occupy the chief place,—means which in the estimation of the world are weak and foolish (2 Cor. iv. 7). Think, too, of the opposition offered to the execution of His gracious designs,—opposition from ignorance and depravity, from the world, and from the hosts of hell; yet it is ineffectual to frustrate the counsels of His wisdom and love.

II. **This work of redemption supplies, not to the redeemed only, but to the creation of God, a fit theme of the highest exultation and praise.** The prophet calls on all orders of creatures. The redeemed are not themselves addressed. Could *they* need any excitement to joy and praise? There are beings, indeed, who will not sing. They rather look on with malignity and "howl for vexation;" for this deliverance frustrates their designs, abolishes the evil they labour to extend, and exalts the name they dishonour (1 John iii. 8). What must be the mortification of that proud and wicked spirit! What fills others with joy will be to him a source of bitter disappointment. It does not surprise us that the fallen angels should raise no song of praise. But what shall we say when we recollect that there are human beings for whose redemption Christ died, to whom the glad news are proclaimed, but who yet reject salvation? This is impiety, folly, and madness, of which even devils cannot be accused.

With these exceptions of fallen spirits and impenitent men, the whole creation of God obeys the joyous call. 1. *The holy angels* delight to behold sin condemned, its works abolished, and its slaves disenthralled (Luke ii. 14, xv. 10). 2. Even *the inanimate and irrational parts of creation* have an interest in Israel's redemption. As this work advances, creation is freed from the vanity to which it is subject (Rom. viii. 20, 21). Not only has earth, as smitten with the curse, been comparatively unfruitful, but its various productions have been desecrated to the vilest purposes,—have been compelled to minister to the sensuality, avarice, and other passions of mankind. The prevalence of purity, justice, sobriety, and mercy will deliver the inferior creatures from a load of misery, and restore all things to their right uses. No sooner is a sinner born of God than he contemplates the works of God with a new eye. He hears them proclaiming the goodness of his heavenly Father, and praising Him by fulfilling His word. Meditating on these results, it is no wonder that the prophet should represent nature in the happy coming age as inspired with new life, clothed with new beauty, and delighting to open her treasures and pour forth from them abundance of good (Ps. xcvi. 11–13, xcviii. 7–9).

If, then, we would see God's glory, we must study His chief work. There is enough in redemption to awaken our joy.—*James Stark, D.D., of Dennyloanhead: Posthumous Discourses*, pp. 59–99.

This is the response of the prophet's soul to the redemption announced in the preceding verses. His joy is as reasonable as it is excellent; the demand he makes is as just as it is poetic.

There is instruction here as well as eloquence.

I. Redemption is peculiarly God's work. "The *Lord* hath done it; the *Lord* hath redeemed Jacob." 1. This is the teaching of *Scripture* throughout. 2. On enlightened and careful consideration, *reason* pronounces that it could have been accomplished by God only.

II. Redemption is the work in which the glory of God is most conspicuously manifested. "The Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and *glorified Himself* in Israel." In His material works we see His wisdom, power, and goodness, and they should be devoutly studied by us as revelations of what He is: but in *this* work we have a disclosure of His patience, His forbearance, His love, His self-sacrificing pity—those *moral* attributes which are most worthy of our admiration.

III. The redemption that God has wrought is a work that demands universal praise. The heavens and the earth may well be called upon to unite with us in thanksgiving, for they also shall share in the blessings of this wonderful redemption (Rom. viii. 19–21; P. D. 975, 2465).—*J. Alwin Fiide.*

The Fulfilment of Prophecy in the Career of Cyrus.

xliv. 28. *Cyrus, my shepherd, shall perform all my pleasure.*

The fulfilment of prophecy is one of the two supernatural arguments for the truth of the Scriptures. I now present in some detail the fulfilment of prophecy in the career and conquests of Cyrus.

Isaiah wrote not less than a hundred and thirty years before Cyrus was born; and not less than a hundred and fifty years before his conquest of Babylon. It was long before the Median kingdom existed. The captivity of Judah had not begun. Three or four generations lived and died between the prophet and the Persian prince. The prophet could not possibly have other means of knowing who Cyrus was to be, or what he was to do in the world, than the simple revelation of the facts by the Spirit of God. Yet that he foretold the conqueror's career, down to minutest details, is established by precisely the same kind and amount of evidence which proves that either Cyrus or Isaiah existed at all.

I. The *name* of Cyrus, the point of the compass indicative of his *birthplace*, and the *direction of his march upon Babylon*, are distinctly foretold. "Thus saith the Lord to *Cyrus*, I have raised up one from the *North*. From the rising of the sun—that is, from the *East*—shall he call upon my name." The two points of the compass named in this language of Isaiah are singularly true. Cyrus was born in Persia, which was east of Babylon. It was commonly called "the East." One historian speaks of it as the "land of the sunrising." But at a very early age Cyrus was removed to Media, lying on the north of Babylon; and it was from Media that he came down, at the head of victorious hosts, upon the doomed capital. The prophet thus sees in a vision a prince of *eastern* birth marching upon the city from the *north*, and that his name is *Cyrus*.

Small matters these, but all the more significant for that. The question is: Who told Isaiah such minute details about a man he never saw or heard of; coming from a kingdom which at that time had no existence; achieving a conquest which then had not been dreamed of? How did he know what name the future conqueror would bear, a hundred and thirty years before he had a name?

Did anybody ever predict Bonaparte's conquest of Italy a century before his birth? Did ever statesman or magician, as far back as A.D. 1650, declare that, a century and a half later, a conqueror born in the west of Italy would come down from the north and take possession of Rome, and that his name would be Napoleon? Yet this is in kind what the Hebrew prophet did. The question is, Who told him all that? How did he alone, of all the inhabitants of the world, find out the facts so exactly and so minutely?

2. Isaiah furthermore describes with remarkable accuracy *the personal character of Cyrus*. His warlike spirit, his towering ambition, the rapidity of his conquests, the equity of his administration, and his heathen religion, are all declared after the manner of prophecy. "Calling a *ravenous bird* from the East," is the prophet's language. Prophetic vision deals largely in symbols. The eagle is its favourite symbol of an aspiring, warlike, swift conqueror. "Who raised up the *righteous man* from the East" is the prophetic description of Cyrus. It is almost the exact language in which historians describe the government of the Persian king. "The just one" he is often called. "Take example from the Persian," the tutors of Oriental princes used to say to their royal pupils. "I have girded thee, though thou hast not known Me," are the words which prophecy puts into the mouth of God concerning him. This is a distinct prediction of his ignorance of the true God.

These are but a few specimens of the pro

phetic touches of which there are many more, portraying with an artist's skill the character of this monarch. Imagine now that, in addition to announcing the name and the birthplace of Napoleon a hundred and thirty years before he was born, the magician had described him as an eagle in his conquests; had said that he would originate a superior code of jurisprudence,—the "Code Napoleon;" and that in his religion he would be a Romanist. Would not such hints, *added* to the items before named, redouble the surprise at the magician's power? Would not men ask with astonishment who he was, where he came from, by whose authority he spoke, and where he got his information? Yet this is just what Isaiah declares of the great conqueror of the East.

3. The significance of the prophecy deepens, when it comes to describe *the conquests achieved by Cyrus*. Passages abound of which these are specimens: "He gave the nations before him. He made him ruler over kings. He made them as dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. The isles saw it and feared, they helped every one his neighbour. Every one said to his neighbour, 'Be of good courage.' I will subdue nations under him. I will loose the loins of kings."

By such rapid glances, the half of which I do not quote, the prophet foretells the victories of Cyrus over the great nations of the East; the consternation of their kings; their alliances for mutual defence; and the velocity with which the Persian legions marched from victory to victory.

Turn we now to history: what has that to say? It does but repeat the prophecy in describing the facts as they occurred. Says one. "He had scarcely gained one victory, before his tumultuous forces poured down on other battle-grounds. Scarcely had one city fallen, before he stood thundering at the gates of another. Empires were like dust before him, and cities like chaff." That prophecy, "*I* will loose the loins of kings," had its exact fulfilment in the consternation of Belshazzar at the handwriting on the wall, when the Persian armies were on the march, and within twenty-four hours would be heard tramping the streets of the doomed capital.

4. The prophecy of the *downfall of Babylon deserves distinct review*. The prophetic story runs in this style: "Evil shall come upon thee. Thou shalt not know from whence it ariseth. Thou shalt not be able to put it off. Desolation shall come suddenly, which thou shalt not know." Thus is expressed the sudden, the unexpected, the irresistible, and the *improbable* calamity which was coming upon that haughty city.

Just such, in fact, was its conquest by Cyrus. That event, to begin with, was in itself, and in any form, improbable. The military science of the age pronounced Babylon impregnable by any methods of assault or siege then known. So secure did king and people feel that it could not be taken by human force or strategy that on the very night of its capture by Cyrus, they were given up to feasting and carousal behind their insurmountable walls. The king would not believe the rumour of the enemy's entrance, even when the blood of his people was flowing in the streets.

Here, again, little incidents are detailed which no soothsayer would have thought of, or would have dared to predict, if he had thought of them. "I will say to the deep, 'Be dry.' I will dry up thy rivers. I will open before him the two-leaved gates. The gates shall not be shut." The significance of this language will appear from arraying it side by side with the historic facts. Babylon was a city fifteen miles square. It was intersected by the river Euphrates, as London is by the Thames, and Paris by the Seine. Solid walls surrounded it three hundred and fifty feet high, and broad enough on the top for four chariots to be driven abreast. The two sections again were separated by walls running along both banks of the river. Fronting the streets on either side were folding gates for convenience of access to the stream by day, which the police were instructed to close at the setting of the sun.

Cyrus took the city by a remarkable stratagem. He invented a novel way of marching his army into impregnable Babylon. If he could not march *over* the walls, he would contrive to march *under*. He did it by a very simple expedient, when once thought of, but only he had the genius to think of it. He dug an immense canal *around* the walls, and turned the river Euphrates into it. Then he marched his army at dead of night, and in dead silence, *under* the walls, in the vacant bed of the river. But this brought him only between the two other immense river-walls inside. How to surmount these was the question. The indomitable general had provided scaling-ladders for the purpose. But the God of Isaiah had done better for him than that. He found those gates which let the citizens down to the river in the day-time—"two-leaved," that is, folding-gates—wide open. Like other drunken policemen, the custodians of Babylon had neglected to close those gates. Even the palace gates were not closed. The invader got near enough to hear the drunken carousals of the king and his courtiers inside, before they were convinced of his approach. Do you not now see a new meaning in the words, "I will dry up thy rivers; I will open the two-leaved gates; the gates shall not be shut; I will loose the loins of kings"?

Herodotus, writing seventy years afterwards, says, "If the besieged had been aware of the designs of Cyrus, they might have destroyed his troops. They had only to secure the *folding gates* leading to the river, and to have manned the embankments on either side, and they would have enclosed the Persians in a trap from which they could never have escaped. *As it happened*, they were taken by surprise; and such is the extent of the city that they who lived in the extremities were

made prisoners before the alarm reached the palace." "As it happened." Yes, it happened; but a hundred and more years before God had said by His prophet *how* it should happen. He had said, "*I* will open the two-leaved gates." So Cyrus found them wide open, and the way clear to the very banquet-hall of the palace, just as Isaiah had said, before Cyrus was born, that they should be.

The question therefore returns, laden with redoubled significance, Where did Isaiah get his information? Who told him that Babylon, a hundred and fifty years afterwards, would be shut off from the Euphrates by gates? Who told him that they would be folding-gates? How did he know that a man named Cyrus would enter the capital in the bed of the river, and on that particular night, contrary to usage and to law, would find that the police had left those gates open, as if on purpose to let the invader in? In short, how came he to write *history* a hundred and fifty years beforehand? Did any other historian ever write his history a century and a half before it happened, instead of a century and a half later, and be lucky enough to have it all happen to be true, even down to the structure and the opening of gates?

5. One other feature of the prophecy and the history in parallels remains to be noticed. Isaiah explicitly foretells *the restoration of Judah from captivity, and the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, through the agency of Cyrus*, God declares by the mouth of the prophet: "I will direct all his ways. He shall let go my captives;" even saying to Jerusalem, "Be built," and to the temple, "Thy foundations shall be laid. He shall let go my captives, not for price or reward. Ye shall be redeemed without money. Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight."

Here we find another group of details which no uninspired mind could have guessed at, and no soothsayer would have dared to predict. Every one of them was to the last degree improbable. No statesman of the age did conjecture them. In the prophet's time there were no captives at all in Babylon from Judah. When they became captives, long after, it was improbable that they would be released in any way by an Oriental despot, flushed with victory. They were very valuable captives. They were of an intelligent race. Good servants, able-bodied men and women for household use, skilful artisans, honest labourers, were abundant among them. Men of learning and genius, like Daniel, some of whom were deservedly advanced to high places in the realm, were Hebrews. Never was a more valuable class of slaves of equal number held by the rights of war than those held under command of Cyrus from Judea. It was the last thing to be expected from an Eastern despot, that he should let such a people go free; that he should charge no ransom for them; that they should not be compelled to take their freedom by force or stratagem; that their master himself should restore to them their plundered treasures, and direct the rebuilding of their desolated temple. Never was a prediction more improbable on the face of it.

Yet all these things happened, just as Isaiah said they would. The truth of the history no infidel presumes to question, whatever he may think of the prophecy. The question therefore returns again, How did Isaiah get his knowledge of coming events? Who told him *facts* a hundred and more years before the wisest statesman of the age had once thought of them as *conjectures*? Did any other man, not inspired of God, ever coin history thus out of guess-work? Did ever romance fall true like this? Sir Walter Scott wrote historical romances. Has "Ivanhoe" or "Quentin Durward" ever come true? Toss up a font of alphabetic type at random in the air, and will they come down all set and ready for the press in the form of the "Arabian Nights?" Yet this is, in substance, what infidelity asks us to believe, when it denies the gift of Divine inspiration to the Hebrew prophets.

Such, then, is the argument from fulfilled prophecy for the Divine origin of the Scriptures. The career of Cyrus is but a single sample. Other cases of the same kind swell the proof to volumes. The present condition of Babylon, the destruction of Moab, the fall of Tyre, the conquest of Egypt, the doom of Damascus, the desolation of Idumea, the sack of Jerusalem, the life, death, and burial of Christ, are events which belong to the same class. They all abound with the same sort of coincidence between the prophecy and the history. The coincidence extends to minute details. It is sustained without a break through long-continued narrative, covering years—yes, centuries, and involving the destiny of individuals with the fate of nations and of empires.

Such intricate and involved prevision no human mind could have painted without a break in the truthfulness of the story, unless inspired by an omniscient God. Any other solution of the mystery throws upon us a weight of credulity a hundredfold greater than that of faith in the "Arabian Nights" as authentic history. For the most part infidelity feels this, and very shrewdly decides to let the fulfilled prophecies of the Bible alone. There is no other argument for the truth of the Christian Scriptures, which infidels so generally agree to *ignore* as this.—*Austin Phelps, D.D.*

Crooked Places Made Straight.

xlv. 2. *I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight.*

Man *must* go; the only question is —*How?* He may go, either with God, or without Him; God does not force Himself upon us. Whether we go with God, or without Him, we shall find crooked places. But having taken God as our leader, we have come to know what is the meaning of having these crooked places made straight for us. Straightness may be in apparent crookedness; amid all the curvature and intricacy, Christians have been brought through upon a course, that for all high purposes—filial education, spiritual culture, and strength—has been practically and really straight. A child might go to the geographer, and say, "What nonsense you talk about the earth being round! Look on this great crag; look on that deep dell; look on yonder great mountain, and the valley at its feet; and yet you talk about the earth being round!" The geographer's view is comprehensive; he sees a larger world than the child has had time to grasp. We should regard the text—

I. As a warning. There *are* crooked places. One could wish that we could make one's own the experience of those that have gone before; but each man must run his own course.

1. *There are crooked dispositions,*—men of whom you can make nothing. Let the young, especially, be forewarned, and so forearmed. There are those to be met with in life, who, when you think you are walking in the line of their sympathies, will turn perversely upon you; men who, in the midst of your strenuous efforts to serve them, will be as unthankful and ungracious as the rock or the sand that is unblest by all the rich rains of Heaven.

2. *There are crooked places in circumstances.*

When we think we are proceeding most satisfactorily, we sometimes come to knots and difficulties of which we can make nothing.

3. *Crooked places are found in the uncertainties of life.* No man can certainly say what will transpire during the next hour; and so, again and again, to our disappointment and mortification, we are compelled to withdraw from our methods, and to abandon that on which we had set our heart.

II. As a promise. "I will go before thee." This was a Divine promise made to Cyrus; and God has made the same promise to all who put their trust in Him. It is surely something to have a Father's promise singing in the heart. Many know the inspiration even of a human promise. We need the triumphant faith that says definitely to God, "Thou didst promise this, and we wait for its fulfilment." We need patience, too; patience that comes of faith, that God may, so to speak, have time to fulfil His promise. God does not say *when* He will straighten our path; nor *how*. He who waits for God is not misspending his time; such tarrying is the truest speed. If we could believe that, how calm, how quiet, how strong, how sublime would be our life!

III. As a plan. We should regard the text as a scheme—a method, a special way of doing things; "I will go *before* thee." The word *before* shows the plan; and it also expresses the *difficulty* on the human side. God does not say, "I will go alongside thee;" nor, "I will go behind thee;" but *before* thee. Sometimes, it may be, so far before, that we cannot see Him. There is sovereignty here; but there is love and tenderness too, as when the mother goes before her child that is just learning to walk. The idea of God going before every man, as if he were the only man in the world, does not dwarf God, but rather exalts Him exceedingly. "My Father and your Father," said Christ, "my God and your God."

Conclusion.—Let us beware of regarding the truth of the text as a mere

matter of course There is an essential question of character to be considered: "The steps of a *good man* are ordered by the Lord;" "No good thing will He withhold from *them that walk uprightly.*"

2. Let us beware of regarding this text as *a license for carelessness.* "The place whereon thou standest is holy ground," is the expression of every man who knows what it is to have God going before him.—*Joseph Parker, D.D., The City Temple*, pp. 4–12.

Every Man's Life a Plan of God.

xlv. 5. *I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.*

This declaration renders credible the sketch given by Xenophon of Cyrus's rare excellence of character. He was a model of greatness in every form, because God had guided him, unseen, to be the minister of His own sovereign purposes to the nations of that time. Others have been manifestly "guided" by God for their work: Abraham, Joseph (Gen. xlv. 8), Moses, Samuel, Paul—Christ Himself (John xviii. 37). But they differed from other men only in their consciousness (more or less clear) of their being divinely "guided" for their work. The "guiding" is granted to all men, *i.e., God has a definite life-plan for every human person, guiding him, visibly or invisibly, for some exact thing, which it will be the true significance and glory of his life to have accomplished.*

I. This a truth thought of by few men, but constantly set forth in the Scriptures. They show us not only a divine plan in the life of men obviously great, but also that the conditions of obscurity and depression may be the necessary first chapter in a great career (*α*). They also show us that God has a personal interest in every man, bestowing on him one talent or more, kindly observing how he employs them; that it is the privilege of every man to live in the secret guidance of God, which implies that there is a plan in which he is to be guided, and that God governs the world in accordance with pre-arranged purposes, which implies that there are such purposes in regard to the individuals by whom the world is made up (H. E. I. 4015–4025, 2246–2248. 2323, 2325, 3403).

When we turn from God's Word to His works, we find the same universal and minute arrangement. Every particle of matter, every force of nature, has a purpose, and is used for the furtherance of a comprehensive divine plan.

It is contrary, then, to both these revelations to suppose concerning any man that his Creator has no definite thoughts concerning him, no place prepared for him to fill, no use for him to serve, which is the purpose of his existence. Every human soul has a complete and perfect plan cherished for it in the heart of God. What dignity does this thought add to life! What support does it bring to the trials of life! What instigations does it add to send us onward in everything that constitutes our excellence!

But there is an immense difference between things and us. They all serve their use; they cannot break out of their place. But we are able, as free beings, to refuse our place and the duties God appoints. (*β*)

II. Moreover, as God has for every man a definite life-plan which, being accepted and followed, will conduct him to the best and noblest end possible, so He will appoint for him the best possible manner of attaining it. Whatever you have laid upon you to do or to suffer, to want, to surrender or to conquer, is exactly the best for you. Your life is a school exactly adapted to your lesson, and that to the last, best end of your existence. If your sphere is outwardly humble, if it even appears to be quite insignificant, God understands it better than you do, and it is part of His wisdom to bring

out great sentiments in humble conditions, great principles in works that are outwardly trivial, great characters under great adversities and heavy loads of incumbrance. The tallest saints of God will often be those who walk in the deepest obscurity, and are even despised or quite overlooked by man. What comfort there is in this truth for us in circumstances otherwise depressive! What invigoration under sorrows otherwise crushing! (P. D. 3235, 3243).

III. But how are we to get hold of this life-plan God has made for us, and find our way into it?

1. Negatives to be avoided. (1.) Never try to be singular. If God has a distinct design for every man's life, let him seek to be just what God will have him to be, and the talents, the duties, and circumstances of his life require him to be, and then he will be peculiar enough. (2.) Do not seek to copy the life of another. God has as many plans for men as He has men; and, therefore, He never requires them to measure their life exactly by any other life. (3.) Never complain of your birth, your training, your employments, your hardships; never fancy that you could be something if only you had a different lot and sphere assigned you. God understands His own plan, and He knows what you want a great deal better than you do. (4.) While you surrender all thought of making a plan for yourself, do not expect that God will show you the chart of all His purposes concerning you. He will only show you into a way where, if you go cheerfully and trustfully forward, He will show you on still further (P. D. 1440, 1656, 1658).

2. Things we are to do. Consider (1.) the character of God, and you will draw a large deduction from that; for all that God designs for you will be in harmony with His character. Many employments are by this first principle for ever cut off. No thought is permitted you, even for a moment, of any work or calling that does not represent the industry, justice, truth, beneficence, mercy of God. (2.) Your relation to Him as a creature. As such it is your general duty to be and to do what He wills; and nine-tenths of your particular duties may be settled, at once, by a simple reference in this manner to what God wills (P. D. 3505). (3.) You have a conscience, which is given to be an interpreter of His will, and thus of your duty and destiny (H. E. I. 1308). (4.) God's Word is a guide to present duty, which, if faithfully accepted, will help to set you in accordance with the mind of God and the plan He has laid for you (H. E. I. 543, 558–579). (5.) Be an observer of providence: for God is showing you ever, by the way in which He leads you, whither He means to lead. (6.) Consult your friends, especially those who are most in the teaching of God. They know your talents and personal qualifications better, in some respects, than you do yourself. (7.) Go to God Himself, and ask Him to make clear His will concerning you. He will certainly do so. This is the proper office and work of His Spirit. By this private teaching He can show us, and will, into the very plan that is set for us (H. E. I. 2872, 2875).

Application. 1. Has your life been in accordance with the plan of God? If not, let the past suffice, and humbly seek divine guidance for the future. 2. Young man, all your best opportunities are still before you. Seek God, and consecrate your life to Him, knowing assuredly that He will lead you into just that life which is your highest honour and blessing. 3. How sacred, how strong in its repose, how majestic is a life ordered according to the plan God has formed for it! Living in this manner, every turn of your experience will be a discovery to you of God, every change a token of His fatherly counsel. Oh, to live out such a life as God appoints, how great a thing it is!—to do the duties, make the sacrifices, bear the adversities, finish the plan, and then to say with Christ (who of us will be able?)—"It is finished!"—*Horace Bushnell, D.D.: The New Life*, pp. 1–15.

(α) David among the sheep; Elisha following after the plough; Nehemiah bearing the cup; Hannah, who can say nothing less common than that she is the wife of Elkanah and a woman of sorrowful spirit—who that looks on these humble people, at their humble post of service, and discovers at last how dear a purpose God was cherishing in them, can be justified in thinking that God has no particular plan for him, because he is not signalised by any kind of distinction?—*Bushnell.*

(β) Which, if we do, then we sink into something lower and less worthy of us. That highest and best condition for which God designed us is no more possible. We are fallen out of it, and it cannot be wholly recovered. And yet, as that was the best thing possible for us in the reach of God's original counsel, so there is a place designed for us now, which is the next best possible. God calls us now to the best thing left, and will do so until all good possibility is narrowed down and spent. And then, when He cannot use us any more for our own good, He will use us for the good of others—an example of the misery and horrible desperation to which any soul must come, when all the good ends, and all the holy callings of God's friendly and fatherly purpose are exhausted. Or it may be now that, remitting all other plans and purposes in our behalf, He will henceforth use us, wholly against our will, to be the demonstration of His justice and avenging power before the eyes of mankind; saying over us, as He did over Pharaoh in the day of his judgments, "*Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.*" Doubtless He had other and more genial plans to serve in this bad man, if only he could have accepted such; but knowing his certain rejection of these, God turned His mighty counsel in him wholly on the use to be made of him as a reprobate.—*Bushnell.*

The Unknown Influence of God.

xlv. 5. *I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.*

A great Babylonian library, consisting of numerous clay tablets, with arrow-head inscriptions burnt into them, has recently been deciphered. The results are most astounding, confirming once questioned statements of Scripture history, throwing light upon obscure events, and correcting not a few false impressions. Among the principal corrections thus afforded is that of our views regarding the person and religion of Cyrus. Cyrus, it seems, was not a Persian, but an Elamite, and was not a Monotheist, but a worshipper of heathen divinities, adopting Merodach, the god of Babylon, when he conquered that city. The last fact adds great emphasis to our text. Cyrus, to whom the words are addressed, is now proved to be a pagan, a polytheist, an idolater. Yet even he was girded by the unknown God of heaven and earth. Let us consider this unknown influence of God.

I. It springs from the Almighty Power of God. God is not merely a passive object of worship. He exerts active influence. He did not only work in the past in creating the world. He is a living, active God now. Jesus said, "My Father worketh *hitherto.*" Perhaps the poorest definition of God ever framed is that of "A power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." Still even this meagre, shrunken description of Divinity recognises the fact of an active Divine influence. Now, God's power is not limited by our confession of it, nor by our unwillingness to submit to it. It inspired the eye of the Greek artist and the tongue of the Greek orator as truly as those of a Christian Chrysostom and Fra Angelico.

II. It is directed by the Infinite Goodness of God. We circumscribe this goodness to a pale of grace and a day of grace; but it overflows our boundaries and breaks out, free as the air and broad as the sunlight. God does not wait to be called. He is the first to awaken His slumbering children. The grace of God anticipates the faith of man; for if it is dependent on faith for its fullest manifestation, yet even that very faith is a Divine gift (Eph. ii. 8). God thinks of the heathen, and gives strength to those who know Him not. Then, no doubt, if a Chinese Mandarin pronounces a just sentence, or a Hindoo Pundit utters a true thought, or an African Chief vindicates the rights of an oppressed tribe, the goodness of these heathen men is an

outcome of God's goodness to them. Let us take heart; there is more grace in the world than we know of.

III. **It aims at the execution of the Will of God.** Cyrus is called God's shepherd (xliv. 28). So even Nebuchadnezzar, a man of a very different character, is called by God "My servant" (Jer. xliii. 10). 1. *Some serve God when they think to oppose Him.* As the gale that seems to be tearing the ship to pieces may be driving her the faster to her haven. So Satan, in Job, aiming at opposition to the right, occasioned the most glorious vindication of it. Persecutors often help the cause they hate. 2. *Many, like Cyrus, serve God unconsciously.* As the corn ministers to our sustenance unwittingly, and as science reveals the glory of God, even when the naturalists who pursue it are agnostics. God endows us with faculties, not that they may rust in vile repose, but to be devoted to His service. Happy are they who are enlightened to serve God consciously and willingly with the powers which they have derived unconsciously from His broad and liberal grace!

Practical conclusions:—1. *The unknown influence of God should lead to our knowing God.* We have not to search the heavens for the unseen God. He is nigh us, at our right hand. Our own experience and the blessings of our own life should open our eyes to the goodness of God. Cyrus, trained in heathenism, might be forgiven if to the end he was girded only by an unknown God. Not so we, with light to interpret the providential work of God in our experience.

2. *This influence, once recognised, should lead us to trust God.* If God girded Cyrus the heathen, will He not gird Israel His people? If He helps those who know Him not, will He not much more aid those who seek and trust Him?

3. *This influence should warn us against neglecting the recognition of God.* We cannot escape from God. To do so would be our own undoing. We have deep reason for thankfulness that God has not withdrawn His hand from us while we have ignored Him. But the hand which girds can ungird!

4. *This influence should prompt us to greater zeal in Mission work.* For (1.) God proves that He claims the heathen by His present influence on them. (2.) He has begun the work and will help His servants in it. (3.) It is sad that millions should still be left in ignorance of the hand that girds them with the strength of life.—*Rev. W. F. Adeney, M.A.: Homiletic Magazine*, vol. xi. pp. 204–206.

The Former of Light and Creator of Darkness.

xlv. 6, 7. *I am the Lord, and there is none else, &c.*

These words occur in the remarkable prophecy of the capture of Babylon by Cyrus; a prophecy fulfilled to the letter.

What was the end proposed in bringing Cyrus to Babylon, and in giving him that empire? The usual answer is, that he might deliver the Jews out of captivity. This is true. But if we rest here, we shall see only a small part of the design of God in this providence. There was a greater end to be answered than even the deliverance of the Jews. It is stated in verses 5, 6. The great end of this particular dispensation was to deliver Cyrus and his people from the delusion that there are two eternal and independent Principles, symbolised by Light and Darkness; the one good, and the source of all good; the other evil, and the source of all evil; the one giving blessings to mankind, the other inflicting on them punishments and miseries. Its chief purpose was to bring the inhabitants of all the provinces of the vast Persian empire to know that Jehovah was the Lord, and that beside Him there was no other God.

How was this merciful purpose accomplished? God began in Babylon itself. 1. You recollect the story of

the young Hebrews who refused to worship the idol set up there, and were cast into a furnace of fire, from which they were delivered unhurt. We should look beyond that deliverance, great an event as it was in itself, to the end which God intended by it, even to set Himself above the idols of the heathen. The Babylonian idol was put to shame in the presence of its assembled worshippers; and the monarch was led to declare publicly, by a decree, that there was no God like the God of Israel, that could deliver after that sort. All the rulers of the provinces were assembled at that festivity, and what was then done would be spread to the utmost border of Nebuchadnezzar's dominion. 2. Later on he acknowledged, even more emphatically, that Jehovah is the King of heaven (Dan. iv. 34–36). 3. Then there was the capture of Babylon, in exact accordance with Isaiah's prophecy.—With all these things Cyrus and his Persians would be acquainted; and thus they would be taught the great truth. that there is but one God, far above every power, subjecting all things to His control, and who alone ought to be worshipped. To the worshippers of Ormuzd and Ahriman God declares, in our text, that He alone forms the light and creates darkness; that He makes peace and creates evil; that there is no power beside Him; no power co-equal and eternal with Him; that good and evil are but His instruments, and continually subject to His all-controlling power.

Were there any effects of this dispensation of Providence? There were. Cyrus embraced this great truth of the existence of one supreme God, and issued a decree for the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, in terms which acknowledge Jehovah to be the God of heaven and earth, who had spoken by His prophet concerning those very events (Ezra. i. 1–3). In the same book we have also decrees of Darius and Artaxerxes, in which, under the appropriate and supreme title of "the God of heaven," Jehovah is acknowledged as the supreme God. Though the religion of the Persians afterwards became corrupted, it is probable that among them some remained holding the vital truths of piety, even to the days of Christ. "The Magi" who came from the East seeking our Saviour were probably Persians, worshippers of the true God, who, having been instructed especially by the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel, were waiting for redemption, and expecting the appearance of the Redeemer.

Besides their connection with the history of God's gracious dealings with man in past times, the words before us contain some great principles that concern us.

I. Take this general principle, "*I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God beside Me,*" and mark a few of the consequences that result from it.

1. As there is one supreme God, whose perfections are infinite, whose glories are unshadowed, our first duty is to keep Him ever in our thoughts, to set the Lord always before us. For this reason, among others, was the Son of God manifested, that our meditations on the Divine character might be more constant and impressive, because brought more within the limits of our conception (H. E. I. 846–848).

2. As there is but one God, so there is but one government and will; and therefore we can be at no loss, when that will is made known to us, to discover the line of duty. Idolaters, acknowledging different rulers among their gods, could have no settled principles. The dominion of one god interfered with that of another. Will was opposed to will, and therefore law to law. To us there is but one God, and therefore but one law. What a foundation for morals does this furnish! and what a foundation for hope! The law comes from an all-perfect Being, and therefore changes not (Ps. cxix. 152). It is for all men alike. It can never be transgressed with impunity. To think that it may be so transgressed is one of the most perilous of all sins (Deut. xxix. 19, 20). All its forms are forms of the

one great law of love (Matt. xxii. 37–40). And it has its one source in love: "God is love!"

II. We have the declaration, *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil.*" Light is the emblem of good; darkness the emblem of evil. According to the opinion of the Persians, these were eternal and independent principles; a system which afforded no hope of deliverance. But here our God declares that both are His, either by formation or permission; both are under His control, and at His disposal.

1. He is the Author of all light or good. All our blessings, spiritual and temporal, come from Him, in the overflowing of His spontaneous bounty. They place us, therefore, under the greatest obligations of gratitude and obedience to Him.

2. The text refers us to darkness or evil. (1.) Of *moral evil* He is not the author, but He has permitted it. The heathens knew that it existed, and, unable to account for the fact, invented an eternal being, all evil himself, and the source whence it proceeds. Our Bibles explain this great mystery. We can conceive of two sorts of creatures; either moved by a sort of mechanical impulse, and thus doing what was right, and then what is called virtue could not have existed, and there would have been no more of holiness or virtue in a saint or angel than in the atoms which compose the material universe, moved each to its own place by the appointment of the Divine Will; or possessing will, and sufficient power to choose what is good, and yet liable to the seductions of vice. God chose to create beings of the latter kind. Virtue implies the power of preference and choice, and from the wrong use of this power in creatures whom God endowed with it, evil proceeded. The creature is directly the author of evil; but God has permitted its existence. Even this permission, terrible as it is in its direct consequences, over-ruled for good (H. E. I. 2276–2280).

(2.) As moral evil is by mission, so *natural evil* is by His infliction. The miseries which have been the consequences of sin have been so by His appointment. They are all evidences that He hates sin. The various afflictions which come upon men in the course of divine providence are all according to God's appointment, because He is determined to subject man to a state of discipline in reference to another world. And He has connected inward misery with sin, that it might be felt by us to be "an evil thing and a bitter," that so we might be constrained to ask for deliverance. It is good for us to feel this.—*Richard Watson: Works*, vol. viii. pp. 478–494.

This sublime asseveration is true in the realms both of creation and Providence. It is opposed to the Oriental doctrine of two opposite creators, and may have been intended for the benefit of Cyrus, who was probably a disciple of that doctrine. It affirms the opposite doctrine of our Supreme Being. We use the text as affirming God's supreme disposal of earthly affairs.

I. THE IMPORT OF THE STATEMENT. It is opposed to the doctrine of two creators in its strong affirmation that whatever is done, of both kinds, is done by the one Being who speaks. And it is opposed to the doctrine that God does not interfere in human affairs; it strongly affirms the contrary, and traces all action to Him. For fuller statements of the truth in both its aspects, such passages may be consulted as Isaiah xi. 12–14, xliv. 24–28; Acts xvii. 26–28; Matt. vi. 26–34. With such passages as these in our minds, we shall perceive that the divine activity was concerned in the creation of all things in the material universe, and is concerned in their sustentation and control. We shall perceive that He has to do with the nations of the earth, appointing their position, measuring their prosperity, and directing the circumstances that conduce to it. He separated the Jews

from other nations and from the land of Egypt. He gave Nebuchadnezzar his commission in connection with their chastisement and captivity. He appointed Cyrus to be the instrument of their return. We shall perceive that each individual man is the subject of His action. The general management of the world includes the special Providential management of the individual. For the whole of life is composed of its numberless minute circumstances. Birth, infancy, the training which influences character and position, prosperity, adversity, alternate light and darkness, sickness, death, its time and manner, with the causes leading to it —all are in His supreme all-controlling hand.

II. THE SATISFACTORINESS OF THE STATEMENT.

The government of the world is in the best hands. 1. *It is in the hands of one Person.* Government by one supreme mind is, in itself, the best form of government. Monarchy, with unlimited power in the possession of the monarch, is the ideal government. Why is it desirable and necessary to limit the monarchs of the earth by bringing in other counsellors? Because no man is competent to the task of personal government. If one could be found possessed of wisdom that could make no mistake, equity that could do no wrong, goodness that sought only the well-being of all, and power that could give effect to all his decisions, he he would be fit to govern the world. But no such man can be found. The best is imperfect. And the supremacy might fall into the hands of folly or wickedness. Human rulers must be surrounded, therefore, with the safeguards and limitations that are found necessary in experience. But in God all qualifications meet for the centring in Him of unlimited rulership.

2. *It is in the hands of One who possesses the competency to govern without being limited.* For the wisdom, power, goodness, and righteousness that are requisite to the uncontrolled universal government are possessed by Him. These attributes are esentially in His nature, and their exercise essential to any action He performs. Therefore He makes no mistakes, therefore no difficulty is insuperable by Him; therefore all His methods are arranged with a view to the general good, even although they may not seem so, as storms bring benefit to the atmosphere, and therefore no injustice is done by Him to any of the creatures that are comprehended in His wide dominion.

3. *It is in the hands of One who possesses the right to control human affairs* (1 Chron. xxix. 11, 12). He created. He preserves. Man's sin has not destroyed God's governmental right. It has created a necessity for darkness as well as for light. It is for Him to determine the measures of light and darkness that shall brighten or cloud the pathway of every one.

These truths are capable of important uses. Let us—

1. *Acknowledge the divine supremacy.* It quiets the soul in the experience of life's alternate light and darkness. Without this, a man feels that he is like a waif on the waters, driven hither and thither without power of effective resistance. He will chafe. With it, he is like a ship under the guidance of a competent captain. Human life becomes entirely different when we are satisfied that its vicissitudes are not the result of accident, but are controlled by the supreme Intelligence.

2. *Submit to the divine arrangements.* The question is not speculation. It affects our interests and our feelings. Darkness may envelop us, losses may be sustained. Sorrows, some of them deep, heart-rending, long sustained, may be appointed. There may be rebellion in heart. There may be the mere submission of the heathen, which only means that we submit to our lot because resistance is useless. But there may be Christian submission. It proceeds from the heart's submission to God Himself. It bows to the will of God because of the confidence in the character that directs the will. It is enough to say "the Lord hath done it." It is satisfied with the voice of Jesus in the storm: "It is I." Like

the great Example, it says, "Not my will, but thine be done, O my Father."

3. *Accept the divine discipline.* When the light shines upon our way, let us be glad and thankful. When the darkness gathers, let us ask, "Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" "What is the sin on account of which the chastisement is sent?" Believers are chastened with a view to their improvement; to the deepening and enrichment of their spiritual life. Many have found their times of trouble times of richest spiritual fruitfulness. And sinners are visited with dark days as warnings. The sickness and sorrow that rend the heart are meant to show the uncertainty and insufficiency of earthly things, and to rend the heart from sin.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The Origin of Evil.

xlv. 6, 7. *I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness, &c.*

This bold unqualified assertion that the Source of all light is also the Fountain of darkness, that evil as well as good is the work of God, must task and perplex every thoughtful mind. No intelligent reader can fail to be struck and impressed by the opening words of the chapter: "Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus." We have to bear in mind that Cyrus was *a Persian.* The creed of Cyrus and the Persians, though singularly pure and noble, had one grave defect. They believed in one God indeed, and thought of Him so nobly that their symbol for Him was a circle with wings—the circle to denote the completeness, the perfection, the eternity of God; and the wings His all-pervading presence. But while they believed in one only God (Ahuramazda), the Maker of all that was good, they also, and out of reverence for One to whom they dared not attribute any wrong, believed in an anti-god (Ahriman), whom they made responsible for all that was evil. We may fairly say, that since these words were addressed to a Persian, their main purpose was achieved if they conveyed to him the thought that the universe was not governed by two rival powers, but by one Supreme Person, ever in harmony with Himself, who tolerated and controlled the evil forces of the universe no less than the good, though He did not originate them. But, softened and modified thus, the claim is tremendous; and yet it meets and satisfies the cravings both of intellect and heart as no easier, no dualistic theory does or can do. The intellect demands unity. And how can our hearts be at rest until we know and are sure that God rules over the kingdom of darkness as well as in the kingdom of light? "I am the Lord, and there is none else." Obviously the words open up the whole question of the existence, the permission, the origination of evil. And, in considering this question, it will be well for us to determine—

I. What, and how much, of the evil that exists we can ourselves honestly attribute directly and immediately to God our Maker.

1. Much of the evil within and around us is of *our own* making. A large proportion of the pain, loss, and moral defeat of which we are conscious, has sprung from our own follies and faults. After making all due allowance for hereditary bias, for unhappy and unfavourable conditions, for almost irresistible conspiracies of opportunity with inclination, we are conscious of many faults and sins which we might have avoided and ought to have avoided. God forbade the sins into which we fell. His Spirit strove to hold us back from them. We *would* give in to them, as we now confess with penitent shame. Candour compels us to exonerate Him from all responsibility for the sufferings they have produced.

2. Much of the evil that has lowered and afflicted our lives has been of *our neighbours'* making. We inherited, with much that was good, some evil bias from our fathers. We have often had to breathe an atmosphere charged with moral infections from the corrupt habits of the world around us. Our education was not good, or was not wholly good and wise. As we look back and think of all we have lost and suffered, it is probable that we attribute far more of the evils which have fallen on us to *men* than to God. Here already is an immense deduction. Take away all the wrongs, pains, losses, temptations, sins, which might and would have been avoided had both we and our neighbours done our best to obey the law of conscience even, and how much do we leave? Very much less than we commonly assume.

3. For much that *seems* evil to us is not really evil, or is not altogether evil. Cyrus and his Persians had such evils as noxious plants and animals, excessive heat and cold, famine, drought, earthquake, storms, disease, and sudden death in their minds mainly when they spoke of the works of Ahriman. But, as we know, *these* apparent ills are not necessarily ills at all, or they are products of causes which work for good on the whole, or they carry compensations so large that the world would be the poorer for their loss. This point admits of much illustration, *e.g.*, storms destroy, but revivify the air; the struggle for existence among plants and animals evolves their more perfect species, &c. Much that we call evil is even designed and adapted to call our attention to the true order of human life. Those who are driven towards pessimism could hardly do better than rouse themselves to look on human life as a whole.

II. **In what sense may we reverently attribute all evil to God?** Here we approach a problem which the wise of all ages have pronounced insoluble; and hence it becomes us to move with diffidence, and to bear in mind that the most we can hope to attain is a working hypothesis which will commend itself to our reason, not a final solution of the mystery.

The question with *us*, after all, is not of what we can discover, but of what God has revealed, of how we are to explain and vindicate a claim which He Himself asserts. Science herself admits that, by a thousand different paths of investigation and thought, it is led to the conclusion that, if there be a God at all, there can be but one God. We see most of God in the highest of His works, *i.e.*, in man, and in that which is highest in man, viz., thought, will, affection. In God we have the creative and Supreme Spirit, Maker of all things, the Fountain of all force, the Administrator of all laws, of whom we frame our highest conception when we think of Him as the Source of all that is noblest in man—as the Infinite Mind, the pure Eternal Will, the absolute Love. This being so, we ask—

1. *How did evil arise?* For *the origin* of evil we must go back to the creation of all things. There must have been a time when the Great Creative Spirit dwelt alone. In that Divine solitude the question arose whether a creation should be called into being, and of what kind it should be. What, then, is implied in the very nature of active intelligent creatures such as we are? We would not have had God surround Himself with a merely inanimate world, nor tenant that with mere automata, incapable of a spontaneous and enforced obedience. But, if free to think truly, must not active intelligences be free to think untruly? if free to love, must they not be free not to love? if free to obey, must they not be free to disobey? *The very creation of beings in themselves good involves the tremendous risk of their becoming evil.*

Must we not go further, and say that it involved a dead *certainty*, a certainty which must have been foreseen and provided for in the eternal counsels of the Almighty, that in the lapse of ages, with a vast hierarchy of creatures possessed of freewill, some among them would assert and prove their freedom by disobedience? How else could

man, *e.g.*, assure himself that he *was* free? This being so, how long would it be before he put his freedom to the touch? The poet Cowper says: "I could sit at ease and quiet in my chamber all day long; but the moment I knew the door was locked upon me, I should try to get out at all risks." Free creatures, again, creatures with intelligence, will, passion, are *active* creatures, and there is something in the very nature of activity which blunts and weakens our sense of inferiority dependence, accountability. The Bible affirms that what Reason might have anticipated actually took place. It tells us that both in heaven and on earth the creatures God had made *did* thus fall away from Him. And it moreover asserts, in accord with philosophy and science, that, by their disobedience to the laws of their being and happiness, they jarred themselves into a false and sinister relation to the material universe; that, by introducing moral evil into the creation, they exposed themselves to those physical ills from which we suffer to this day.

2. *How may evil be justified?* How can we reconcile it at once with God's perfect goodness and unbounded power? On our hypothesis we reconcile it with His *power* by the plain and obvious argument that even Omnipotence cannot at once create freewill and not create it. If God made man free to choose evil, how can He possibly *compel* him to be good except by taking away his freedom of choice and action? But if we would reconcile the existence of evil with the *goodness* of God—and this is by far the most difficult achievement—we must take the *whole* theory of human life and destiny taught by the Bible, and not merely a part of it. The Bible teaches that the lines of human life and destiny are to be produced beyond the grave; that while, in large measure, men do receive the due reward of their deeds here and now, yet a more exact retribution will be meted out hereafter—a more abundant reward for all that has been good in us, a more searching punishment of what is evil; that in His compassion God came down to us, virtually saying to us, "I might much more reasonably attribute the evils from which you suffer to *you* than you to me. But, see, I freely take them all on Myself. I take away the sin of the world by a sacrifice so great, that you can but apprehend it afar off. I foretell a final, a complete victory over it. And, meantime, it shall have no power to hurt you if you will but put your trust in Me."—*Samuel Cox, D.D.: Genesis of Evil* (two sermons), pp. 1–41.

The Heavens Dropping Righteousness.

xlv. 8. *Drop down, ye heavens, &c.*

There is a fulness in the language more than commensurate with the revival of the piety and temporal well-being of the Jews after their return to Canaan. It points to Gospel times; righteousness, and all the blessings of the Messiah's reign, were to descend as copious showers and refreshing dews upon the earth . . . so that the desolate wilderness should suddenly become fertile (see vol. i. pp. 364, 399). The evangelic prophet invokes this. Such are the Divine promises. We may observe from the words under consideration—

I. *That the Divine influence is requisite to the prosperity of religion in the heart of the believer, and in any Christian community.* The moment the Church of Christ loses sight of this truth, that moment she becomes shorn of her strength. She goes a warfare at her own charges. With frail human power she attempts what Omnipotence alone can effect. In a work so great our mightiest efforts are powerless when unaided by Divine strength. This truth should be a settled principle in our hearts: "*All evil is of myself.* I inherit it from my birth," &c. Sin

robbed man to some extent of *physical* beauty, and does so now. The change in his *mental* and *moral* nature was equally great. Sin weakens and debases the powers of the soul. The understanding is blinded and the heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, or it would require Satanic wickedness for men to sin against God as they now do. Our sins are unspeakably greater than we can conceive of. All evil is from ourselves, and all good is from God. This is true of saint and sinner. Divine influence is requisite in the *conviction of sin*, and in the *conversion of the sinner* (H. E. I. 1477, 1400–1405). Their progress in the Divine life, conquest over every foe, &c., are derived from "the supply of the Spirit of Christ;" in whom they possess all spiritual blessings, and are now the "partakers of the grace of life," and inheritors of the kingdom of glory.

II. *That the resources of Divine grace, which God has promised to bestow in order to effect this prosperity, are abundant and inexhaustible.* Such prosperity is eminently enjoyed where there are numerous conversions, and where the life of God in the hearts of His people is exemplified in every action by intense affection for one another, and their united continuous effort for man's highest weal and the Redeemer's glory. Everything revealed to us of the Divine character and purpose encourages such effort. The promises are pregnant with blessing. They reveal the purposes of Divine love, and warrant the most enlarged expectations and fervent appeals to God that He will "do as He has said." His gracious and immutable purposes are the universal spread of the Gospel. God shall pour down righteousness, the earth shall receive the abundant blessing and bring forth salvation (Rev. xi. 15).

III. *That human instrumentality is invariably employed, in co-operation with Divine agency, in achieving this prosperity.* It is impossible to ascertain the precise point where human instrumentality and Divine agency meet, and how both are united to attain the same purpose. Our duty is to labour in dependence upon God. Would it be possible to find a Christian whose conversion was effected apart from human agency in some form or other? Every outpouring of the Spirit upon the world has been preceded by united supplication. Say not that human instrumentality is unimportant; nothing is so which God deems good to employ (1 Cor. i. 21). When gracious influences come down like showers and refreshing dew, the sinner should open his heart to welcome the blessing.

IV. *That such a consummation is to be devoutly desired and sought by the fervent and united prayers of His believing people.* The *salvation of sinners*, and the *happiness of believers*, should prompt the prayer, "Drop down," &c. Such a consummation would cause earth to bear a closer resemblance to heaven. "The whole earth shall be filled with His glory."—*T. Jowett, The Christian World, July* 31, 1863.

Striving with God.

xlv. 9. *Woe unto him, &c.*

The idea of rebellion is one of frequent recurrence in this book. A sinner rebels against God's authority and dominion. Is frequently styled an enemy, and this is evident both from his heart, tongue, and life. Is frequently described as fighting against God, or contending with Him, and this is the idea of the text.

I. Manifestation of this strife. To strive is to oppose, and in a variety of ways sinners exhibit opposition to God.

1. The unblushing opposition of infidelity. Nothing can exhibit more daring wickedness. Rejects the Scriptures, and boasts of the sufficiency of nature to teach us virtue and religion. How devoted they are in prosecuting their work! How eager to dissuade

others from their adherence to the Christian religion!

2. The fearless transgressions of the bold and daring in iniquity. Who lay aside all the restrictions of conscience, and the respect of the virtuous around them. Who give themselves up to every evil way and work. Who have no fear, &c. (Luke xviii. 4).

3. Those who resist the providential dealings and interpositions of God for their salvation. Providence subserves the designs of grace. Adversity, &c., are often employed to lead to thought and consideration, &c. The resistance of these is striving against God. If these do not soften, they harden (H. E. I. 56–59, 145, 229).

4. Those who will not yield to the overtures of the Gospel. The Gospel proclaims men enemies, and seeks their return to friendship. The Gospel proclaims an amnesty; but of course it is on the principle of their throwing down their weapons and ceasing to strive and rebel. Whoso persists in unbelief strives against God — yea, against the riches of His grace.

II. THE EVILS OF THIS STRIFE.

1. It is full of infatuation. It cannot be vindicated upon the principle of reason or propriety. A sign of the mind being blinded by the wicked one. There cannot be greater madness or more complete folly than to strive against God.

2. It is fraught with evils to our own souls. It excludes the greatest blessings God has to bestow (Jer. v. 25)—the divine favour, peace, hope, all the rich communications of heaven. It degrades the mind, hardens the heart, &c.; converts conscience into a gnawing worm. Often makes life insupportable.

3. It is full of ingratitude. The child—the befriended. But all figures must fail in the illustration.

III. ITS FINAL RESULTS. 1. We cannot injure Deity. We might a potsherd like ourselves. Neither, 2. can we benefit ourselves. Who hath hardened himself against the Lord and prospered? Nor can we, 3. Escape the triumphs of the Divine judgments over us. One must prevail. We cannot! Then God will; and His prevailing will be our "woe." The woe of His righteous sentence, &c. To each and all such (Rom. ii. 9).

CONCLUSION.—1. Let the careless think and stop in their career. 2. Let the hesitating allow good emotions to prevail (H. E. I. 1489). 3. Let the seeking now exclaim, "I yield, I yield, I can hold out no more," &c. 4. Let the children of God rejoice, and labour for the weal of others.—*The Pulpit Cyclopædia*, vol. iii. pp. 150–152.

CAVILLING AGAINST GOD.

xlv. 9, 10. *Woe unto him that striveth, &c.*

I. That man is formed by God, and that all his affairs are ordered by Him as really as the work of the potter is moulded by the hands of the workman.

II. That God has a design in making man, and in ordering and arranging his circumstances in life.

III. That man is little qualified to judge of that design, and not at all qualified to pronounce it unwise, any more than the clay could charge him that worked it into a vessel with want wisdom.

That God is a Sovereign, and He pleases. He has formed man as He chose, as really as the potter moulds the clay into any shape that he pleases. He has given him his rank in creation; given him such a body and intellect as He pleased; He has determined his circumstances in life just as He saw fit. And He is a Sovereign also in the dispensation of His grace—having a right to pardon whom He will—nor has any man any right to complain. Not that God, *in all respects*, moulds the character and destiny of men, as the potter does the clay. God is just, &c., as well as Sovereign; and man is a moral agent, and subject to the laws of moral

agency which God has appointed. God does nothing wrong. He does not compel man to sin and then condemn him for it (H. E. I. 1779, 1780). He does His pleasure according to the eternal laws of equity; and man has no right to call in question the rectitude of His sovereign dispensations.—*Albert Barnes, D.D.*

The People of a Prayer-Hearing God.

xlv. 11–13. *Thus saith the Lord, &c.*

A wonderful promise wonderfully fulfilled. The facts and principles involved in it are of perpetual value.

I. God has a people whom He distinguishes as His sons.

II. He is specially concerned for their welfare and happiness, present and future.

III. He is always ready to interpose for them; you may ask, command.

IV. He has ample ability and resources for their help.

V. He has made final provision for their final deliverance out of all trouble.—*J. Lyth, D.D., Homiletical Treasury, Isaiah*, p. 61.

The Concealment of God.

xlv. 15. *Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.*

This is one of many similar declarations (Ps. xviii. 11, xcvii. 2; Job xxxvii. 23; Ex. xxxiii. 18–23). All this concealment proceeds, not from any unwillingness to disclose His greatness, but rather from the fact that, since this greatness is divine, it could not be endured by human vision. Mysteries are necessary portions of the dealing between finite beings and the Infinite, and are forced into God's dispensations by His unmeasured superiority to the work of His own hands. (α)

Our text seems to breathe the language of admiration and praise: (β) it confesses God mysterious, but at the same time its tone is that of grateful acknowledgment. We wish to examine the fact that the God of Israel is a God that doth hide Himself, and to prove that this concealment should move us to admiration, thanksgiving, and awe. Consider—

I. God's hiding of Himself with regard to His own nature and properties.

We know nothing of God in Himself; we know Him only in His attributes, and His attributes only as written in His Word and shown in His works. But when these are studied most carefully, God remains even then the greatest mystery to man; we know not what God is, nor how He subsists. (γ) Even where God makes announcements of His nature, they are such as quite baffle our reason. For example,—1. The doctrine of the Trinity. 2. His revelation of Himself as "the Saviour." What mysteries are involved in the Incarnation and the Atonement! 3. The application of redemption to the individual, by the operations of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is a fact, but who can explain it to us?

It seems unnecessary, after thus considering what God has hidden with respect to Himself, we should dwell at any length on what He hath similarly hidden in the works of nature. Everything within, above, and around us, is matter of inscrutable mystery. (δ)

What we would ever maintain in respect to all this concealment of the Deity is, that it should summon forth our thankfulness. *It prevents great evils, and secures great blessings:*

1. What food would there be to human pride, if reason availed even to the finding out of God!

2. If God did not thus hide Himself, there would be no reason for

faith, and consequently none of the glory we render to God when we exercise it, and none of the moral advantage which flows to us from the being required to lean constantly on an invisible staff.

3. We could not then have that conviction that in the Bible we have the Word of the living God which now arises from our perception that the obscurity, of which some complain, is the result of the sublimity of the disclosures there made to us.

4. The wonders of nature, had they been completely unveiled, would soon have ceased to interest and to call forth our admiration and praise; whereas, by being partially hidden, they are made to contribute to the glory of their Creator. (ε)

II. How God hides Himself in regard to His dealings with His creatures.

1. God conceals much *in the dispensations of His Providence;* He does not lay open the reasons of His appointments and permissions. But besides the moral discipline that is thus secured for us, will not the ultimate solution of all those mysteries gain more glory for God, than if the whole course of Providence had been made plain from the beginning?

2. God hides from His creatures *the day of their death.* But this concealment is in many ways a blessing to the individual and to society.

3. God has hidden much from us respecting *the nature of a future state.* He has given much to exercise faith and occupy hope; but if the veil had been more fully withdrawn, what would have become of a state of probation, with all its present and permanent blessings? (ζ)

4. God has hidden from man *the future history of this world.* But by means of prophecy this hiding of the Deity has been made to minister peculiarly to our advantage. (η)

5. God has hidden from us *the results of our own actions.* But this is palpably to our advantage, for thus we are reminded, as we could not have been in any other way, of our dependence upon God, and the necessity of acknowledging Him in all our ways. Especially is this a blessing in the workings of benevolence. We are thus led to carry on our operations in the best possible spirit, in the consciousness that we are but instruments in the hand of God. Besides, it is this very hiding which enables us to honour God by our performance of duty. It were comparatively nothing to labour with the certainty of success; the trial of obedience lies in the being summoned to labour when we cannot be assured of success: and if we prosecute the enterprise, in spite of all that is disheartening in the hiding of results, we glorify God by that best of all offerings—a simple and unquestioning conformity to His will: our own obedience being of a far higher cast than if we were stimulated by the known amount of success, is nothing less than a fresh proof that we should praise God under His character of "the God that hideth Himself."—*H. Melville, A.M.,* "*The British Pulpit,*" vol. iii. pp. 142–152.

(ε) Suppose God to make a full and adequate revelation of Himself: there is a point in the examination of that revelation at which man's understanding must fail; for man's understanding, at the best, is finite. God is infinite. The finite cannot grasp the infinite; and therefore there must be a point at which the power of the finite understanding that would take in the infinite communication must cease, and at that particular point there would be *a horizon to man's perceptions of truth.* That is, to us there would be a point at which the revelations would cease to be explanations, and a man's view would be bounded, and a mystery would commence. For what is a mystery? A mystery is a revelation unexplained; a truth told distinctly, but not reasoned upon and explained; a truth so told that we can boldly say *what* it is, but not *how* it is. The personal existence of God, as declared in Holy Scripture, is a mystery; it is a revelation unexplained, a statement unreasoned; and it presents a horizon to the human understanding.

In philosophy, facts hold the place which revelation holds in religion. Experience gives the philosopher his facts, and facts bring him to a point where he must confess mystery. Where is the metaphysician that hath ever explained the action of mind upon matter, and the ready movements of flesh and bone at the secret bidding of the mysterious visitant

within? And where is the anatomist who hath discovered its origin with his searching knife? No; there is a mystery in it. For a mystery in philosophy is a fact unexplained, as a mystery in religion is a revelation unexplained.

Take another instance. Much has been discovered, and much has been demonstrated, in the science of astronomy. The motions of the heavenly bodies have been made matter of calculation amongst men; the results proving themselves true by periodical returns of infallible observation. But there is a point at which we reach a mystery here. Upon what do all these calculations depend? Upon what do all these motions rest? Upon a quality which Sir Isaac Newton baptized; he gave the mystery a name; he called it "gravitation." Grant gravitation, and we can reason about the solar system. But what is gravitation? Who can explain that?—*M'Neile.*

(β) That God should disclose thoughts of mercy so vast and far-reaching affects the prophet's mind powerfully. He pauses to say, "How little had I known of God before! Thou art a God that hidest Thyself!" How long the world had lain in darkness, ignorant of these glorious plans of God for its ultimate conversion! Surely the God of such promises should be known by this one great name, "The God of Israel (His own spiritual Zion) the Saviour!" He wears this name most worthily! —*Cowles.*

Compare Romans xi. 33.

(γ) H. E. I. 2229–2224, P.D. 1501–1502, 1525.

There is nothing that should surprise us in this, if we would but observe how little way our reason can make when labouring amongst things with which we are every day conversant; but we should expect that it would be altogether incompetent to the unravelling the Incomprehensible. It will also be evident that we are a mystery to ourselves; that every object around us baffles our penetration; that there is not an insect, a leaf, an atom, which does not master us as we attempt to apprehend its nature and its growth. . . . If, then, making trial of our powers on the commonest objects by which we are surrounded, we feel ourselves defeated in our philosophy by the worm or the water-drop; can it be rational, when we turn ourselves to the study of God, to expect to find the Almighty a being which we may thoroughly comprehend? It is enough that we observe the most gifted of our fellows applying themselves assiduously to the commonest facts, the most familiar occurrences, and yet able to do nothing more than trace a connection between cause and effect. We ought to be convinced that we possess not the capacity which can allow us to embrace the wonders of the Deity. So that not only the stars in their rushings, and the waters as they flow in their tides, but every sand-grain and every bubble, and every beat of the pulse, and every blade of grass, and every floating insect, all join in preparing us for the fact that the God of Israel must be a God that hideth Himself.—*Melvill.*

(δ) We stand in the midst of a mighty temple, the whole visible frame of nature rising around us, like the walls of a gorgeous sanctuary; and we gaze on the beautiful arch of heaven, on the sun walking in his brightness, on the moon, and the stars, and the dark cloud of thunder; but what know we of this magnificent array? What account can man give of the hidden springs of such vast machinery? Who will tell us what is that light which makes all things visible? Who will explain that secret wondrous energy which retains, century after century, so many worlds, each in its separate orbit? Whose penetration is not utterly baffled by the growth of a blade of grass, by the falling of a stone, by the floating of a feather? When asked, we state reasons, and assign causes, but this is only a shifting of the difficulty. It were easy to talk of the gravity of matter, and the laws of nature: philosophy is at fault: the learned man knows little more than the savage of the amazing processes which go on daily in the laboratory of nature: while he may be sitting on the lofty pinnacle of science, a child shall propose questions which shall perplex and confound him, and bring him down from his lofty eminence, and force him to the humiliating confession that what can be discovered by man bears no proportion to what is hidden by God. . . . There is nothing teaches us our own ignorance as knowledge when pushed to its utmost limits. In enlarging the sphere of light, you equally enlarge the surrounding sphere of darkness.—*Melvill.*

(ε) If God had bared the secrets of creation, so that we could exhaust the store-house whose very threshold we are now scarce able to pass, is it not evident that the familiarity would have generated indifference to the skill of the mighty Architect; and that the mere fact that there was nothing to find out would have made us unobservant of the broad impress of Divinity? Under the existing arrangement, as we may term it, of God's hiding Himself, creation ministers perpetually to our awe and admiration of the Creator; every new leaf, as it is turned over by the intelligence of industry and the guidance of inquiry, presenting a new witness to the wisdom and power of Deity, whilst at the same time it tells out the inexhaustibleness of the volume; so that continually learning, and yet continually finding there is more to learn, we pass on from stage to stage, climbing (so to speak) the magnificence of God, only to know that what appeared the summit is but the basis of a loftier mountain; and thus compelled, as marvel on marvel crowds the vision, to exclaim—oh, not with the tongue of regret and murmuring, but with the tongue of worship and rapture—"Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour!" —*Melvill.*

(ζ) H. E. I. 2 78, 2179.

(η) Prophecy a the standing miracle of con-

turies; a miracle so wonderfully constructed, that time, which might be thought to weaken every other, adds only fresh strength to this. The far-off day of its delivery is as surprising as the fact of its fulfilment; but it is clear that the wonder of prophecy is dependent on the combination of our ignorance and of God's knowledge of the future. It is by His displaying His own acquaintance with that which He has hidden from His creatures, that God makes the hiding to put forth the greatest strength against infidelity; indicating from the very beginning the knowledge of all things proves His own omniscience and His sovereignty. So that if the future were open to man's expatiation, there would remain no place for prophecy as the distinct prerogative of Deity, and it would remove altogether that attestation to the truth of Christianity which, growing and strengthening as time rolls on, resists, like a rock, the advance of scepticism. —*Melvill.*

That God is a Saviour is a declaration written in lines of light on every page of the Book of Revelation. What, too, is history, with all its dark passages of horror, its stormy revolutions, its ceaseless conflict, its tears, its groans, its blood, but the chronicle of an ever-widening realm of light, of order, of intelligence, wisdom, truth, and charity? It is a tale of slow, patient, but persistent and victorious progress. Yet there is a destroying power at work in the universe on a scale of enormous magnitude, and to most men the dominant feature in this vast universe seems to be confusion. Shocks and shatterings cause more noise and make more show than the germinations, the uprisings, the upbuildings. The earthquake is long remembered, the soft springing of the corn passes unnoted by. Hence to most men God is hidden. If they believe there is a God, they think of Him merely as the Judge, the Avenger, the Destroyer, not as the Saviour.

But why should God hide Himself? If He has purposes of mercy always before Him, why does He not make them abundantly plain to all mankind? Why leave the world to groan and madden under the terror lest a malignant tormentor should be master and ruler of, at any rate, this lower sphere?

I. The reason lies partly in the essential mystery of the Divine nature —a nature whose judgments must remain unsearchable by man's limited intelligence, and whose ways must be past finding out; His nature and methods we can grasp just as an infant can grasp the thought and purpose of a man (Job xi. 7; Rom. xi. 33).

II. God hides Himself through His patient, deep, and far-reaching method in the government of mankind. He is governing us as free beings on a profound and obscure but benignant method; the aim being to train us to govern ourselves in the light of His truth and love. The only way to govern in freedom is to allow full play to freedom. We are free to try our paths and see where they issue. But when men go astray by the very misery that succeeds their sin (Luke xv. 14), God leads them back to Himself and proves that He is the Saviour.

III. The day of the Lord is a long day. His methods work through generations. Consider the years of the right hand of the Most High, and understand how His way must be hidden in each brief generation; while in the generations in which His hand is on the world in judgment, the darkness in which it is buried must be profound indeed.

IV. God hides Himself behind the fatherly chastisement with which He exercises and educates the individual human soul. It is in the nature of chastisement to hide for a moment the wisdom and the love of the hand which administers it (Heb. xii. 11).

V. There are seasons of darkness in which God seems hidden, which are among the most sacred and salutary experiences of the soul. By them God is drawing out and drawing up its deeper longings and aspirations, exercising its patience, and kindling its hope (H. E. I. 1645–1648, 1656).

VI. God hides, must hide, much of His method, but while the Cross stands as earth's most sacred symbol there

can be no utter hiding of His love. He has set the Cross in the midst of us as the sign how much He cares for us. Whatever we suffer, while that Cross abides, we can say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him"—*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A., in the Christian World*, September 19th, 1879.

When Divine manifestations are described in Scripture, two symbols are used, fire and cloud, symbolising light and darkness. The import of this is that we may know God in part, but cannot fathom His perfections. As an old philosopher said, "Nothing is at once so known and so concealed as God." This union of the knowable and unknowable in God is set forth in the text.

Looked at in connection with the context, the words express astonishment and admiration at the mode in which God fulfilled His purposes through Cyrus. The obscurity of His ways, the incomprehensibility of Providence, is the subject.

I. The Lord is a God that hideth Himself. His dispensations, though always wise and merciful, are often mysterious. This is in harmony with both reason and experience.

1. *From the nature of God, and from the character and situation of man, reason would conclude that the ways of Providence must often be incomprehensible.* For God's wisdom is infinite, His ways above our ways. How can mortals comprehend His counsels and purposes? It is the very height of folly, of profane arrogance, for men to summon the All-Wise to their tribunal. We cannot tell the *end* He has in view, nor assign *reasons* for His procedure, nor foreknow the *effect* of His action. If God were not incomprehensible, faith would lose its value.

2. *Experience proves that God hides Himself.* Why does He suffer wickedness to prosper? Why does He afflict His own children? Why does He cut off the child and the youth? Why do men of eminent usefulness die prematurely, and worthless men live long?

II. Though God hides Himself, He is the Saviour of His people. His inscrutable ways are connected with the salvation of His children.

1. *Think of the attributes of God.* His love wonderful, His power unlimited, His care incessant, His wisdom infinite. Can He err, or be cruel?

2. *Remember His promises.* "All things shall work together for good," &c. In times of darkness and suffering the promises apply.

3. *Look at experience.* Your own. How has God dealt with you? That of others. Reflect on the sufferings of patriarchs, prophets, and saints, and the end thereof.

In conclusion, learn, 1. *The guilt and ingratitude of believers when they murmur against God's dealings.* They assume to be wiser than He, and are impatient and rebellious.

2. *We may well long for heaven.* Here there will ever be darkness; there we shall see light in God's light. All mysteries will be solved.—*Henry Kollock, D.D.: Sermons*, pp. 574–580.

This chapter contains a prophecy respecting the deliverance of Israel from Babylon. God promises to anoint Cyrus to be the saviour of His people, and to do great things to enable him to deliver them from bondage (vers. 1–4). Cyrus was to be thus raised up, not for his glory, but for the sake of Jacob (ver. 4). Though he knew not God, he was to be an instrument in God's hands (vers. 4, 5, ch. xliv. 28). God can use any instrument He pleases (Dan. ii. 21, iv. 35). Contemplating the predicted deliverance of Israel by such a surprising instrumentality, the prophet is filled with amazement, and exclaims, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself," &c.

God hides Himself in two ways.—1. *In the mystery of His counsel.* Instances: His permitting His people to remain so long in such severe bondage, and in the wonderful means chosen

for their deliverance. Many similar instances. No one can say beforehand what are God's purposes in His providences, nor how He will bring them about. History must be their interpreter (Ps. lxxix. 19; Rom. xi. 33). 2. *In His chastisements.* At times He withdraws from His people on account of their sins (ch. lvii. 17). Then they seem to be left utterly in the power of their foes (Ps. xlii. 9). A period of mystery and painful perplexity (Ps. lxxix. 9). But in due time He manifests Himself as "the saviour of Israel." He uses unexpected means for their deliverance, but those means prove abundantly sufficient (ver. 17).

In our text a complaint is made which may be repeated in our own day. (α)

I. That the Saviour hides Himself is a thing to be lamented. Grave evils result therefrom. In His Church there is deadness, barrenness, contentions, divisions. Sinners are at ease in Zion. The foes of Zion are arrogant and insolent. God's kingdom makes no advance in the world. Those who love it are disheartened; their work for the salvation of sinners appears to be at a standstill. A cause of great grief to them. The stoppage of any earthly works is not to be compared with it for calamitousness. The stoppage of works which give employment to thousands is a great loss to a country; but a much heavier loss is the stoppage of the work of grace which gives eternal life. What will become of our children, relatives, neighbours, the world at large, should saving operations be at an end? Nothing can revive it but the coming forth of the Saviour.

II. The Saviour does not hide Himself without a cause. His sovereignty is not the cause of His concealment, nor of His withholding comforts from His people; for it is His delight to dwell in their midst and to bless them. The cause will be found in *them.* From below, and not from above, comes the mist that forms itself into thick clouds and hides the face of the Saviour from us (ch. lix. 2; H. E. I. 1644). We see a father sometimes showing his displeasure towards his disobedient child by refusing him his company, and so deals the Lord with His children as long as they continue contented with a low spiritual state, or a state of transgression into which they have fallen (ch. i. 15; Hos. v. 15). This is the cause, and this only; not because His people are poor, ignorant, or in trouble.

III. The hiding of the Saviour ought to produce self-humiliation in His people. They ought to inquire into the reasons for their sad and terrible condition, in humble prayer before God (Ps. xliv. 24). They are apt not to do this; prayerlessness is one terrible result of backsliding (ch. lxiv. 7). But until they give themselves earnestly to self-examination, self-reformation, and humble waiting before God, His face will be hidden from them.

IV. The Saviour continues the same though He hides Himself. Though He hid Himself in the days of Isaiah, He was still the "God of Israel, the Saviour." The sun is as full of light and heat when hid behind clouds as it is when seen in all its glory, and so God is as full of grace and mercy when hiding Himself because of the sins of His people, as He is when manifesting Himself in gracious deliverance. In the day of darkness His people may doubt this (ch. lxv. 15). Nevertheless it is true (ch. lix. 1). Let them return to Him in penitence, and they will find it true.

V. The Saviour does not intend to hide for ever. He has graciously made the term of the continuance of His concealment from us to depend on ourselves (Hos. v. 15). We are told what will certainly happen if His people turn to Him (ch. liv. 7–10).

Let us lay these truths to heart. We greatly need that the Saviour should manifest Himself to us. Let us entreat Him to do so. Model prayers are provided for us in His Word (Jer. xiv. 7–9). Let us present them with the humble perseverance

that is pleasing to Him (ch. viii. 17)! So doing, ere long He will draw near to us; and when He does so, let us lay hold on Him, saying, "O God, Thou art our God; our souls thirst to see thy power and thy glory, as we have seen Thee in the sanctuary." —*William Roberts: Pregethau*, pp. 261–268. *Translated from the Welsh by the Rev. T. Johns, of Llanelly.*

(a) Most commentators take that view of our text upon which the preceding outlines proceed, but a few incline to that here taken. "The words are an abrupt reflection of the prophet in the midst of the messages he has to deliver They allude to the strange work of God in breaking down what He had built, the tabernacle of David, and plucking up what He had planted, the vineyard of Israel." (*Birks.*) "The words have been variously taken:—(1.) As continuing the wondering homage of the heathen; (2.) as spoken by the prophet as he surveys the unsearchable ways of God. (Compare Rom. xi. 33.) Through the long years of exile He had seemed to hide Himself, to be negligent of His people (chaps. viii. 17, liv. 8; Ps. lv. 1) or unable to help them. Now it would be seen that He had all along been as the Strong One (*El*) working for their deliverance." (*Plumptre.*) Though the prophet may have breathed here "the language of admiration and praise" (*Melvill and others*), the circumstances of God's people are often such that they may adopt His exclamation as a lament.

Israel Saved in the Lord.

xlv. 17. *But Israel shall be saved in the Lord, &c.*

The text contains a promise of "everlasting salvation" to the pious just, and is brought forward among the promises of their temporal deliverance from the Babylonish captivity; and there is a better, greater, and more lasting salvation that affects the soul, preserving it from endless misery, and securing its everlasting happiness, in and through the Lord Messiah.

I. THE GLORIOUS OBJECT—"Everlasting salvation," in the Lord.

1. Everlasting salvation includes a deliverance from ignorance, guilt, &c.; and the possession of light, peace, &c.; and this state continued and increased for ever. It is grace consummated in endless glory (Rev. vii. 9, &c.)

2. This everlasting salvation is "in the Lord"—the Lord Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is in Him as a *possession*, purchased by His own blood, in whose right only we can obtain it. It is in Him as an *inheritance*, kept in trust, and to be conveyed by Him to the appointed heirs of it. It is in Him as in a grand *exemplar*, in His human nature, of the complete and final happiness of the saints who are predestinated, &c. (Rom. viii. 29; Phil. iii. 21). It is in Him both as a beatific object and a perpetual medium, through which the blessed will see and enjoy God for ever.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS TO WHOM EVERLASTING SALVATION IS PROMISED—"Israel."

1. Israel is a name of great distinction in Scripture. God Himself gave it to the patriarch Jacob, and in very peculiar circumstances (Gen. xxxii. 28). His posterity bore that name; as we are now called Christians, from Christ. But these were Israelites only by carnal generation—not in spirit and temper imitating the faith and treading in the steps of their progenitors, Abraham, &c. (Rom. ix. 6). The Israelites to whom everlasting salvation is promised, are such as are so in a spiritual sense: and under the name of Israel, in the sense of it, all true believers in Christ are comprehended.

2. True Israelites are such as have given their unfeigned consent to be God's people, subjects and servants—such as have "joined themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant."

3. In consequence of this, true Israelites are such as live in an unreserved subjection to the laws and government of God and the Redeemer (Rom. viii. 22). Through faith in Christ they are virtually united to Him, and from Him receive those hourly supplies of grace that qualify men for every good word and work.

III. THE GROUNDS OF THE CERTAINTY OF THEIR SALVATION.

1. The possession Christ has taken of it, in the name and nature of all true believers in Him (Heb. vi. 20; John xiv. 2, 3).

2. Christ's intercession, which He ever lives in heaven to make for them (Heb. vii. 25).

3. His mighty power which is engaged for them (1 Peter i. 4, 5).

4. God's promise (John v. 2; Tit. i. 2; Heb. vi. 17, 18).

Application. 1. How precious should Christ be to believers! 2. The Lord's people have good reason to love Christ's appearance (2 Tim. iv. 8; Heb. ix. 28). 3. What an encouragement to diligence and perseverance in appointed duty, seeing everlasting salvation will be the consequence of it! (Cor. xv. 58).—*Sketches of Sermons*, vol. iv. pp. 289–294).

How God Reveals Himself.

xlv. 18–25 *For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens, &c.*

In ver. 17, the promise is made that "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." This gives the drift of the whole passage, vers. 18–25. In vers. 18, 19, the words of Jehovah begin with the assertion that He is the absolute One; and from this two thoughts branch off—

1. That the prophecy is a revelation of light, no black art. 2. That the love of Jehovah, displayed in creation, attests itself in relation to Israel. Vers. 20, 21 declare that the salvation of Israel becomes the salvation of the heathen world. In accordance with this holy and benevolent will, the cry is uttered, "Look unto Me," &c. (ver. 22); Jehovah will not rest till His object has been accomplished (ver. 23); but this bending of the knee will not be forced (ver. 24); the reference of ver. 25 is to the Israel of God out of all the human race. There are three leading ideas that are to be gathered out of the passage.

I. **God's revelation of Himself is open and truthful** (ver 19). In ver. 15 we read, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself," and ver. 19 seems to answer the exclamation. Both declarations are true; God cannot wholly conceal nor wholly reveal Himself. A man even is always greater than his greatest work.

1. *God's speech in nature is in no secret place.* The sun is a mighty word of God; but it can tell us only by feeble suggestion of the Sun of Righteousness; and yet the pure mind can see and hear far more of God in nature than the keenest scientific analyst (P. D. 485, 1526, 2545).

2. *God spoke in no secret place when He spoke amid the peaks of Sinai, and on the heights of Calvary.* The laws proclaimed to Moses, and shown to be honourable and glorious in the death of Christ, are the offspring of the Eternal Mind; Calvary is the Divine commentary upon Sinai.

And all really Divine revelation is *truthful.* The command, "Seek ye my face," accounts for the religious nature of man. Not in the grandest of God's works can we rest content, and realise the joy for which we have been created. Seek ye my face in righteousness of life; this is the Divine law of seeking; and all who thus seek after God shall as surely find Him as the new-born child finds the nutriment of its mother's bosom.

II. **God's revelation of Himself is in reference to the highest practical objects.**—"Look unto Me, and be ye saved;" He is "a just God and a Saviour." God gives us such a knowledge of Himself as avails for the great practical ends of life, but not such as to satisfy speculation (H. E. I. 2229–2244).

We know far more of what electricity can *do* than of what it *is.* We do not know what God is absolutely; but we know what He can do for us; He is "a just God *and* a Saviour;" *i.e.*, there is nothing incompatible in

this. As a just Being, He is a God of law; but as a Saviour, He does not cease to be a God of law; by law He condemns, and by law also He saves. Grace is the work of a mightier law than even condemnation.

Note the two elements of the faith which is essential to salvation. 1. "Look unto Me;" lift up your eyes to the Infinite Strength which is reaching down to help you; that is the active element. "And be ye saved;" accept the Divine method of salvation; that is the passive, trustful element.

III. God's revelation of Himself is to issue in the salvation of the whole earth (ver. 23).—This has been the inspired assurance of prophets and apostles even in the darkest ages of the world (Phil. ii. 9–11; Rev. xv. 3, 4). The ruling idea of these and like passages is not merely that evil shall be conquered at the last and goodness triumphant; but that this final issue of things shall come about through men coming to know God in Christ, coming to worship and love Him as the supreme goodness and beauty. The worship of the gods of this world, now so fervent, will be gradually abolished; and life, as it reaches towards the higher developments in this world, will not only be a higher morality, but a clearer knowledge, and a more passionate and enraptured sense of God.—*Charles Short, M.A., Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xv. pp. 120–122.

Comfort to Seekers from what the Lord has not said.

xlv. 19. *I have not spoken in secret, &c.*

We might gain much solace by considering what God has *not* said. In our text we have an assurance that God *will* answer prayer, because He hath *not* said unto the seed of Israel, "Seek ye my face in vain." The proposition I come to deal with is this: that those who seek God, in God's own appointed way, cannot, by any possibility, seek Him in vain; that earnest, penitent, prayerful hearts, though they may be delayed for a time, can never be sent away with a final denial (Rom. x. 13; Matt. vii. 8).

I. I shall prove this, first, by the negative, as our text has it. *It is not possible that a man should sincerely, in God's own appointed way, seek for mercy and eternal life, and yet a gracious answer be finally refused.* For several reasons.

1. Suppose that sincere prayer could be fruitless, then the question arises, *Why, then, are men exhorted to pray at all?* Would it not be a piece of heartless tyranny if the Queen should wait upon a man in his condemned cell, and encourage him to petition her favour, nay, command him to do it, saying to him, "If I do not send you at once an answer, send another petition, and another; send to me seven times, yea, continue to do it, and never cease so long as you live; be importunate, and you will prevail." And what if the Queen should tell the man the story of the importunate widow—should describe to him the case of the man who, by perseverance, obtained the three loaves for his weary friend, and say to him, "Even so, if you ask you shall receive," and yet all the while should intend never to pardon the man, but had determined in her heart that his death-warrant should be signed and sealed, and that on the execution morning he should be launched into eternity? Would this be consistent with royal bounty—fit conduct for a gracious monarch? Can you for a moment suppose that God would bid you come to Him through Jesus Christ, and yet intend never to be gracious at the voice of your cry?

2. If prayer could be offered continuously, and God could be sought earnestly, but no mercy found, then *he who prays would be worse off than he who does not pray*, and supplication would be an ingenious invention for increasing the ills of mankind. For a

man who does not pray has less woes than a man who does pray, *if* God be not the answerer of prayer. The man who prays is made to hunger; shall he hunger and not eat? Were it not, then, better never to hunger? How, then, can it be said, "Blessed are they that hunger"? &c. The man who prays thirsts; as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so he pants after his God; but if God will never give him the living water to drink, is not a thirsty soul much more wretched than one who never learned to thirst at all? He who has been taught to pray has great desires and wants; his heart is an aching void which the world can never fill; but he that never prays has no longings and pinings after God, he feels no ungratified desires after eternal things. If, then, a man may have these vehement longings, and yet God will never grant them, then assuredly the man who prays is in a worse position than he who prays not. How can this be?

3. If God do not hear prayer, since it is clear that in that case the praying man would be more wretched than the careless sinner, then it would follow that *God would be the author of unnecessary misery.* Now, we know that this is inconsistent with the character of our God. We look around the world and we see punishment for sin, but no punishment for good desires, &c.

4. Should there still be some desponding ones, who think that God would invite them to pray and yet reject them, I would put it on another ground. *Would men do so?* Would you do so? Can God be less generous than men?

5. Have you forgotten that *this is God's memorial, by which He is distinguished from the false gods?* (Comp. Ps. cxv. 5 and lxv. 2.) One of the standing proofs of the Deity of Jehovah is, that He does to this day answer the supplications of His people. Could you seek His face, and yet He should refuse you, where would be His memorial? The answer may tarry, but only that it may be the more sweet when it comes (H. E. I. 3895–3898).

6. If God do not hear prayer, what is the meaning of His promises? (*e.g.*, Ps. l. 15, xci. 15; Jer. xxxiii. 3; Isa. lxv. 24, &c.) How shall He make His veracity to be proved if He do not answer His people? But His word *must* stand, though heaven and earth should pass away.

7. If God hath virtually said to us, "Pray, but I will never hear you; seek ye my face in vain," then, I ask, what is the meaning of all the provisions which He has already made for hearing prayer? I see a way to God; 'tis paved with stones inlaid in the fair crimson of the Saviour's blood. I see a door; it is the wounded side of Jesus. Why a Mediator, an Intercessor, &c., &c., if prayer be unavailing?

8. I use the argument which the apostle uses upon the resurrection. If God hear not prayer, *what gospel have I to preach?* As the apostle said concerning the resurrection, "then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins."

9. *Where, then, were the believer's hope?* Hang the heavens in sackcloth, let the sun be turned into darkness, let the moon become a clot of blood, if the mercy-seat can be proved to be a mockery.

10. *What would they say in hell,* if a soul could really seek the Lord and be refused? Oh, the unholy merriment of devils then!

I have been arguing against a thing which you know theoretically is not possible; but yet there are some who, when they are under conviction of sin, still cleave to this dark delusion, that God will not hear *them.* Therefore I have tried, by blow after blow, if possible, to smite this fear dead.

II. *That the Lord does hear prayer may be positively substantiated by the following considerations:*—

1. For the Lord to hear prayer is *consistent with His nature.* Whatever is consistent with God's nature, in the view of a sound judgment, we believe is true. Now we cannot perceive any attribute of God which would stand in the way of His hearing prayer.

2. It is *harmonious with all His past*

actions. If you want a history of God's dealings with men, turn to Ps. cvii. 3. What does He mean by His promises? As I said negatively, if He did not hear, where were His promises? so I say positively, Because of His promises He *must* hear. God is free, but His promises bind Him: God may do as He wills, but He always wills to do what He has said He will do. We have no claim upon God, but God makes a claim for us; when He gives a promise, we may confidently plead it. Promises made in Scripture are God's engagements, and as no honourable man ever runs back from his engagements, so a God of honour and a God of truth cannot, from the necessity of His nature, suffer one of His words to fall to the ground.

CONCLUSION.—*Try for yourself.* If you would know that God hears prayer, you must test the fact, for you will never learn it through my saying, "He heard *me;*" you will only know it through His having heard *you;* and I therefore exhort you, since it is not a peradventure but a living certainty, that "he that asketh receiveth," &c., pray to Him even now to save your souls. Pray as if you meant it, and continue as Elijah did, till you get the blessing.—*C. H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No.* 508.

A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR.

xlv. 21. *A just God and a Saviour.*

These words occur in an assertion of the sovereignty of God, which is repeated again and again throughout this chapter, and forms the essential truth around which all its predictions cluster. Isaiah has foreseen that the Almighty would make Cyrus His servant in breaking the captivity of Babylon, and freeing the people from its thraldom. In this he hears the voice of the one Lord above the changes of the world, saying, "I am the Lord, and there is none else: there is no God beside me." Again, over the wreck of ancient heathendom—Egypt and Ethiopia—the voice of the Sovereign King rings the proclamation, "I am the Lord," &c. And then he gazes into a day when all the ends of the earth shall look to heaven for salvation; and once more he hears the chorus, "There is no God beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me." Hence we see the force of these words for Isaiah; God was just because He was a Saviour, and as a just God He sought to save.

How may this great truth be illustrated, and what lessons flow from it?

I. "A just God and a Saviour." There is in God an everlasting harmony between the just and the merciful. He is just, because He is a Saviour; He is a Saviour, because He is justice seeking to save.

1. Mark the truth on which Isaiah founded this mighty truth, viz., the supreme and solitary sovereignty of God—"I am the Lord," &c. The same Lord was over all; in Him was no double nature; He, the one God, was at once the just God and the Saviour. Realise this, and the idea of the atonement which represents Christ as inducing God to be merciful, passes away (H. E. I. 390).

2. What is God's justice, and what His salvation? (1.) *God's justice is not merely the infliction of penalty; God's salvation is not merely deliverance from penalty.* It is true that He does execute penalty and award retribution. He is just *to-day.* We see it in the stern laws of life. Penalties are the outflashings of a holy anger. (2.) His salvation is more than the mere deliverance from penalty. It *is* that; but it is the deliverance from evil. God would save men from evil by making them righteous; and thus He is at once the just God and a Saviour.

3. Take the two great revelations of law and mercy, and we shall see how the law is merciful, and mercy holy.

The law, the revelation of justice, came

to lead men to God the Saviour. To save man from evil two things are requisite. (1.) *The sense of immortality.* Sin destroys this sense; to awaken him, there is no other voice so powerful as that of the law he cannot obey; the Divine voice in the law speaks to *him*, and the man feels the sublimity of his nature; and there is the beginning of salvation. (2.) *The sense of sin as a power in life.* Man thinks of sin as a misfortune, &c.—anything but a power in him; the law, cursing evil, curses him.

Christ, the revelation of God the Saviour, came to glorify God the just. Men often lose sight of this. Mount Sinai is less terrible than the purity of the man of Nazareth. Men felt it as they said: "Depart from us, for we are sinful." Look at His sufferings. Nothing could tear Him from them—nothing alter His course. Where is there a greater revelation of the righteousness of God? Beneath the Cross we read that God would not pardon without glorifying to the utmost the majesty of the just and holy law. Mark the consummate power of Christ crucified. Sin never was so slain as by Him whom sin slew. The law never was so attested as by Him who bare its penalty.

II. We infer two lessons from this great truth. 1. *The necessity of Christian endeavour.* We are forgiven at once. In one sense, we are justified at once; for the germ of a righteous manhood exists in the first act of faith. But the realisation of it is progressive. Every day we have to wash the robes of our spirits in "the blood of the Lamb."

2. *The ground of Christian trust.* We are delivered from condemnation; and we are reconciled to God's purity. We rely on God's justice; for He will make us righteous and holy in Christ.

There are men who trust in the infinite mercy of God, and feel that He will deliver them at last. Remember, to remain in unbelief is to adopt the spirit which killed Christ. To refuse His salvation is to challenge the holy indignation of the Most High: "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh," &c.—*E. L. Hull, B.A.; Sermons, First Series*, pp. 112–120.

The view we have of the Divine character must have a powerful influence on our own, and will materially affect the whole system of our faith and worship. Everything relating to the perfections and glory of God must be important to us as creatures who live under His government, are dependent on His will, and amenable to His high tribunal. Before Him we must come hereafter, with Him we have immediately to do now. Delightful to know that though just He is still a Saviour, that though a Saviour He is still just. 1. *He is a just God.* The plenitude of His perfections guards Him from the possibility of injustice. Injustice between man and man is occasioned by the desire of some good which could not otherwise be obtained, or the avoidance of some evil which could not otherwise be warded off. But these things can have no possible application to Him who is infinite in wisdom and power (James i. 13). 2. *He is a merciful God.* This is plain from His dealings with sinful men both in providence and grace (Matt. v. 45; John iii. 17). "A just God *and* a Saviour!"

I. The union of justice and mercy in the character of God is illustrated by the mixed character of His dispensation in every age.—His dealings with our first parents after their sin. He appears a just God in the Deluge, a Saviour in the Ark. In the Old Testament sacrifices justice was seen in the death of the victim, mercy in the forgiveness of the transgressor. A just God in the fiery serpents, a Saviour in the brazen serpent. Just in the plague, a Saviour in the censer of Aaron (Ps. xcix. 8).

II. It appears in the appointment of Christ as a suffering Saviour. Christ's death respected God as a judge, ourselves as criminals. Here mercy triumphed in the triumph of justice. Justice must have its

sword as well as its even balance. Crimes unpunished seem authorised. Had sinners been pardoned without a substitute or a sacrifice, the law and the Lawgiver would have been dishonoured. But in the cross of Christ God has given the most eminent display both of His justice and of His mercy; of His justice in requiring such a sacrifice, of His mercy in providing such a substitute (Rom. v. 20, 21). Only thus could the law of God and the conscience of man be satisfied. When the conscience is truly awakened, the mind is acute to discern the hindrances and obstacles to salvation. The mind which abused God's patience before, now painfully discerns the claims of justice; it needs to be shown that God can pardon sin honourably. (α)

III. Our perception of it should have a powerful influence upon us.—1. It should lead us to admire the Gospel, in which these Divine attributes are presented in such glorious harmony. 2. It should give sweetness and solemnity to all God's invitations and promises of mercy. 3. It should deepen our humiliation and repentance, since it is against such purity and mercy we have offended. 4. It should awaken caution against sin and desires after holiness. 5. It should kindle our desires at length to be admitted to heaven, where we shall see these glorious divine attributes fully displayed.—*Samuel Thodey.*

(α) To human apprehensions, light and darkness are not more opposed to each other than justice and mercy. We cannot conceive how they can meet together; for as long as strict justice is executed, no mercy is shown, and the very moment mercy is extended, there is an infringement upon the claims of justice. When a criminal is tried and condemned by the laws of our country, if the just sentence pronounced upon him by the judge be permitted to remain in force, then he receives simply what he deserved—he is treated with strict justice, and there is no mercy in the case. But if the king interpose, and exercise his prerogative to set aside the sentence of the judge and pardon the convict, then the man receives simply what he did not deserve—he is treated with free mercy, and there is no justice in the case. The king is permitted to be unjust on the side of mercy, and it is *only by reversing the sentence of justice* that his mercy can possibly be exercised. He may, indeed, confer a distinguished favour on one of his subjects without any injustice, but this is not what we usually understand by mercy. Mercy implies previous guilt and exposure to just punishment; and we repeat the important statement, that it is only by reversing the sentence of justice that any human authority can extend mercy to the guilty. But God's "ways are not as our ways;" God can exercise mercy to the uttermost without reversing the slightest jot or tittle of the sentence of the most even and inexorable justice. He is "a just God," leaving not the smallest possibility of escape to the smallest sin; and He is "a Saviour," freely and completely pardoning the most atrocious sinner.—*M'Neile.*

A Universal Call from the only Saviour.

xlv. 21, 22. *There is no God else beside me, &c.*

In the words which immediately precede the text, the Lord is showing the gross ignorance and folly of the heathen, whom He represents as setting up the wood of their graven images, and praying unto gods that could not save them. As their idols had not been able to deliver them from the judgments He had inflicted on them for their sins, He calls upon them to take counsel together, that they might be convinced of the vanity of their worship, and of the sinfulness of their conduct; and as He had predicted those judgments long before they were executed, and their idols had not, He appeals to them to acknowledge that it was He alone who could foretell things to come. He then, in the words before us, assures us that there was no god else beside Him; a just God and a Saviour; and invites them all to look unto Him for deliverance from every evil.—Let us consider,

I. The gracious invitation contained in our text. "Look unto me," &c. Observe,

1. *To whom it is addressed.* "All the ends of the earth." To Gentiles

as well as Jews (Matt. xxviii. 19); to *you*. Your past sins may have been as numerous as the leaves of the forest, or the sand of the sea, but that does not shut the door of mercy against you.

2. *What is implied in it.* (1.) That "all the ends of the earth" need to be "saved." Is that true of *you?* (2.) That there is now no obstacle whatever in the way of salvation. The claims of Divine justice have been fully satisfied, and now mercy can be shown.

3. *What it calls upon us to do, in order to secure our salvation.* "Look unto me." Not to any other person or thing, but to *Him*. The explanation of the phrase we have in Num. xxi. 6–9; John iii. 14, 15. It must be the look of faith.

II. THE POWERFUL REASONS BY WHICH IT IS ENFORCED.

1. He who addresses it to us is GOD—God in Christ (2 Cor. v. 19).

2. He is a *just* God — one from whom the guilty cannot hope to escape; one who will show mercy righteously.

3. He is a *gracious* God, for He is "a Saviour." Because of what He has done for us, He can dispense grace to the guilty without tarnishing the lustre of His character, and without any disparagement of His justice and holiness.

4. "He is the *only* God, and consequently the only Saviour." This important fact is twice referred to in our text. Rejecting Him, there is no deliverance for us from the consequences of our sins. As the bitten Israelites would have died had they refused to look upon the brazen serpent, inasmuch as it was the only remedy provided for their cure, so we also must die, miserably and for ever, if we apply not to Him who is the only Physician of souls. Will you not believingly look to Him who alone can rescue you from destruction? Does the shipwrecked mariner turn away his face from his deliverer? Does he reject the assistance of the life-boat that comes to save him? Look to Jesus, and be saved! Believe, and live!—*Daniel Rees: Sermons*, pp. 68–81.

I. The Person who thus calls. "Look unto *Me*." II. The invitation given. "*Look*, and be *saved*." The command to Naaman: "*Wash*, and be cleansed," as if leprosy could thus be got rid of! But obeying that simple command he was cleansed; and obeying *this*, we shall be saved. (α) III. To whom it is addressed. "All the ends of the earth." IV. The reason assigned why we should look unto Him and be saved. "*For I am God*, and there is none else."—*A. V. Griswold, D.D.: American National Preacher*, vol. i. pp. 153–160.

(α) This precept implies a sense of personal need, and a reliance upon the Saviour to supply this necessity. For this is frequently expressed by a look. What mother is there who does not know the eye of her child? When unable to speak, an infant will express its wants by a look in a language she perfectly understands. And who has walked in this great city, and has not been moved by the look of a silent sufferer—some poor distressed object, too timid to ask for alms, but yet turning his eye with a look that expressed far more poignant distress than the most vociferous cries? And where is the eye directed? To those on whom they rely for relief. A child looks not upon a stranger, but upon its parent. A poor man looks not to his still poorer companion, for he expects nothing from him. Jehoshaphat, when invaded by the Moabites, thus addressed the Lord: "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; *but our eyes are upon Thee*." And David, when he would express the confidence of various creatures, says, "*The eyes of all wait upon Thee*, and Thou givest them meat in due season." This sense of our need, and this confidence in the Saviour, are essentially necessary. For never shall we really close with His offers till thus convinced — till we are brought to see that sin has defiled our best performances, and that by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified. Neither shall we then look to Him, unless we have confidence in Him; unless we believe that He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him; and that He is as willing as He is able, freely inviting the chief of sinners.—*Stewart.*

Salvation! A word of large meaning. The soul's salvation! It sug-

gests the idea of danger, from which rescue is needed. It is pardon for the sinner; holiness for the impure; heaven for the wandering and the lost. Here is—

I. AN IMPORTANT TRUTH.

"*For I am God, and there is none else.*" This is not merely an assertion of the Divine unity. It expresses the idea that GOD, and God alone, is competent to man's salvation.

Man is not competent to his own. He cannot change his nature any more than the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the river return to the source whence it arose. Nor can he atone for sin. He cannot perfectly keep the Divine law, starting from any point. And even if he could, it would be nothing more than his duty; it would not cover past sins, any more than the felon's subsequent honesty would cover and atone for his frauds.

No *creature* is competent. Under the Levitical dispensation, sacrifices of animals were Divinely appointed. Yet it is expressly stated that in the nature of the case they were inefficacious (Heb. x. 4). Their utility consisted in their typical reference to the sacrifice of Him whose offering possessed a Divine element. No mere creature can repair man's ruin.

Yet he need not perish. For God can save. He has personally interposed by means of the incarnation, obedience, death, resurrection, and ascension of His dear Son, by which satisfaction has been made to the demands of righteousness, and the Holy Spirit has been sent to renew the hearts of men.

II. A SIMPLE DIRECTION.

"*Look unto me.*" No man understands the care of his soul until he sees his helplessness through sin; nor will he apply to God for salvation until then. God's work in men begins with the truth respecting themselves. Then it proceeds to the truth respecting Christ. This revealed condition on which salvation becomes possible is that the sinner believes in the Saviour (John iii. 16). The metaphor in the text is an expressive one, as setting forth the nature of faith. The Israelites bitten by the serpents were to look to the brazen serpent. You make a promise to a man; he looks to you for the fulfilment. A man is shipwrecked: he looks for deliverance to the lifeboat which he sees making its way to him over the waters. Thus the sinner trusts to the Saviour wholly and only (H. E. I. 1957–1968).

III. A GRACIOUS ASSURANCE.

"*Be ye saved,*" *i.e.*, Ye shall be saved. It is a promise in the shape of a command. The two are inseparable. The believing man is a saved man. The two ideas should be placed together always. Many illustrations of this can easily be collected from the New Testament. The question is, "Do you believe?" Then you are saved, and may rejoice in the fact of your salvation. Your liberty is proclaimed—your pardon written in the Book. If it were possible for a believer to be lost, God's word would be falsified. Many Christians darken their spiritual experience by failing to see the certainty with which salvation follows upon faith, or by losing themselves in metaphysical inquiries as to the nature of faith.

IV. A UNIVERSAL CALL.

"*All the ends of the earth.*" In ancient times the earth was believed to be an extended plain. By the ends of the earth are meant all mankind, even the farthest inhabited point. The call of the Gospel is addressed to mankind in a similarly universal way (H. E. I. 2417).

1. All the ends of the earth need it. The ruin is universal. The helplessness is universal. The plague is everywhere. The race perishes. In all history, in all the world's present population, the exception does not exist. You are no exception. Only thus is salvation possible (H. E. I. 2418–2420).

2. It is sufficient for all the ends of the earth. There is no limit to the sufficiency of the salvation God has provided. The value of the atonement can only be estimated by the infinite value of the Son of God, which

is the same thing as to say it is immeasurable. The Gospel is compared to a feast which a king has provided. But the provision is so ample that, if the whole world accepted the invitation, it would be sufficient. All things are ready. The universal invitation is issued (2421–2424).

3. It is God's will that all the ends of the earth be informed of it One is to tell another. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." The disciples of Christ have been from the beginning providentially scattered abroad that they might preach this word The Church in every age, and every separate church, should be missionary in its character. We must stand in the way, point to the Cross, invite the world (H. E. I. 2448).

4. Its reception by the ends of the earth is predicted. It shall be universally proclaimed, generally received, by all classes and individuals. The present moral desolation shall be fruitfulness and beauty. The desert shall be the garden of the Lord. We expect this on the authority of His word (H. E. I. 2451).

We have seen that God is the only source of salvation for sinners; that in the work of salvation God is everything, man nothing; and that He has authorised all sinners to look to Him for salvation. It follows—

1. That all the glory of salvation must be ascribed to God. Human boasting is excluded. In man's utter ruin and helplessness, God's love in Christ undertook and accomplished the work.

2. That the personal salvation of sinners turns upon their observing the direction to believe. The implication is that the unbeliever is not saved. Refuse to look by faith to Christ, and you exclude yourself. It is a personal matter See that you are united to Christ.

3. That it is the duty of ministers to direct all sinners to look to Him and be saved. Nothing short of this is preaching the Gospel. Not that we can command acceptance. But we can convey God's message to men, leaving the result between Him and them.—*J. Rawlinson.*

(*Sermon to the Young.*)

This is an invitation of surprising mercy to dying, perishing sinners, wherever they may be. It is the great and blessed God Himself calling the Gentile and heathen world to salvation. It is Immanuel, God with us, God who put on our flesh and blood, calling us to look unto Him and be saved. If we are sensible of our misery by nature and practice, if we are weary of sin, and would escape the wrath to come, we must look to Him with an eye of faith and holy dependence as our only Saviour.

I. "**Look unto Me, and be ye saved.**" This reminds us of the time when the Israelites were bitten by fiery serpents. Moses was directed to lift up a serpent of brass, which shone brightly under the rays of an Eastern sun, and was visible from all parts of the camp. By a miracle, every one who looked at this serpent was healed. No doubt every wounded parent directed his eyes to the appointed remedy, and exhorted his children to do the same. As the cure of the brazen serpent extended to the farthest distant part of the Israelitish camp, so the effect of Christ's sacrifice extends to those who dwell in the farthest away parts of the earth; God calls upon "all the ends of the earth," the north and the south, the east and the west. The cleansing power of Christ's blood has no geographical limits; it is not measured by longitude and latitude. Colour and race make no difference. The descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth have an equal claim. All are to come. For what? To be saved. To be saved from their sins; and from the consequences of the crimes they have committed, the vices they have indulged in, the angry passions they have cherished, from the curse under which they were

born, and which many have so well earned for themselves.

But who is it that issues this general invitation? This question brings us to the other part of the text:—

II. "**For I am God, and there is none else.**" God here gives the reason why we should attend to the call, because it is made by Him who has a right to make it, and who is alone able to save.

I. "*I am God:*" therefore (1.) I am all-sufficient to save. What is there that the most miserable of creatures can stand in need of, that is not to be found in ample measure in the treasure-house of God? When the Creator undertakes to be a Saviour, the creature cannot perish. There is wisdom enough in Him to make the fool wise; light enough to scatter all our darkness; power enough to make the weakest strong in grace, and active in every duty.

(2.) It is for Me to prescribe the means of obtaining salvation. "I am God;" look unto Me, therefore, ye sinners, and be saved; I will give salvation to him that looks; he that believeth on Me shall be saved from sin and death.

2. "*There is none else;*" there is none that can save beside Me. The salvation of a sinner is too great a work for any except God. A man cannot change a dead sinner into a living saint; he can make a house, a watch, a ship, foretell an eclipse, calculate the distance of a star; but of God alone can it be said, "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." It requires a Divine Power to secure one in temptation, to fit him for the society of God and angels, to bring him through death to eternal glory; and yet all this is to be done if the sinner is to be saved.

None but God has a right to declare the terms of salvation. If He says, "Look and be saved," who shall forbid the banns, or narrow the breadth of the invitation? If the Lord of Heaven say to perishing sinners on earth, "Ye shall be saved, if only ye believe," who dare impose painful rites or laborious ceremonies, or human absolution? The faith spoken of must be a vital principle, showing itself in repentance and aiming at holiness; for a dead faith cannot save (H. E. I. 1978–1986).

CONCLUSION. — How broad and glorious is the salvation of Christ! how it answers to the weaknesses and the wants, the miseries, the dangers, and the fears of the awakened sinner! It reaches not only to us, but to even the savage nations, such as our fathers once were. But we must not trust to wearing the name of Christ; we must learn to look to Him with the eye of faith, the heart of love, and the life of sincere obedience. — *George Clark, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 279–285.

I. THE BLESSING OFFERED: salvation.

II. THE PERSONS TO WHOM IT IS OFFERED: "all the ends of the earth;" Gentiles as well as Jews; every one who needs it.

III. THE CONDITION ON WHICH IT IS OFFERED. "Look unto Me."

IV. THE ARGUMENT THE BENIGNANT SAVIOUR EMPLOYS TO INDUCE GUILTY SINNERS TO ACCEPT IT. "For I am God, and there is none else; "a just God and a Saviour." The argument is twofold: 1. Sinners may trust Christ without suspicion, for He is omnipotent. 2. Sinners should trust Christ alone, for there is none else able to save.

CONCLUSION.—The duty of all immediately to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ that they may be saved It is the voice of infinite love that entreats us to be saved. Shall we then turn away from the invitation of such a Saviour? Besides, it is an authoritative command to us to do our duty. It is outrageous folly to trifle with the injunctions of the King of heaven. To those who are looking to Christ, the text is fraught with the richest consolation. "He is able to

save you to the uttermost."—*W. France: The Scottish Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 42–48.

Give your most earnest thought to these four great facts: I. All need to be saved. II. There is One who can save. III. The salvation He offers is worthy of Him. It is present, ample, certain, complete. IV. There is only one way by which that salvation can be made ours, by looking to Jesus. —*J. A. Spurgeon: The Penny Pulpit, New Series, No.* 351.

The Nature and Author of Salvation.

xlv. 22. *Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.*

The glorious end which the Spirit contemplates in calling upon all men everywhere to look unto Jesus is their salvation. (α)

I. What is implied in this word, "And be saved."

There is implied in it, 1. *Deliverance from the dominion of sin in this world.* We argue the necessity of this deliverance from the facts—(1.) That sin is the root and fountain of misery. To remove effects, we must remove the cause: before man can be happy, he must be holy; before he can be saved from sorrow, he must be saved from sin. (2). That they who enter heaven must be identified with heaven in character (H. E. I. 2730–2738). (3.) That deliverance from the power of sin is the very purpose for which the Spirit of Christ is given to them that believe. Hereby we dissipate the false and misleading ideas of those who imagine that salvation is a state into which we are not introduced till we die.

2. *Deliverance from the consequences of sin in the world to come.* These include, (1.) Irretrievable exile from the presence, and the glory, and the joy of Jehovah—the radiating centre of all happiness and peace. (2.) The righteous punishment of all the sinner's transgressions. (3.) The extinction of hope. (4.) That bitter remorse which springs from the recollection of having lost a heaven that might once have been won, and plunged into a misery which might once have been shunned. This is the worm that never dies, this is the fire that is never quenched.

II. The way in which this salvation is to be secured.

"*Look* unto Me, and be ye saved." There is in this verse no preliminary required of man, only a look at the Saviour! No preparatory reformation, no preparatory repentance even! Repentance itself is the gift of Christ (H. E. I. 4225–4231, 4249, 4250).

Look! when God commands a work, He presents the might to do it. (β)

III. The Character in which the Saviour presents Himself to sinners.

Look at Christ, 1. As having borne the punishment which you deserved, and thereby made it inconsistent with the equity of God to punish the believer.

2. As our High Priest who pleads for us within the veil, and sends His Spirit forth to seal us to eternal glory.

3. As able to instruct us savingly in all the will and word of God.

4. As the Sovereign King, whose laws we are unreservedly to reverence and obey.

5. As the source and distributor of all blessings, who has a right to all we hold on earth.

IV. How are we to look to Jesus?

1. In looking to Jesus, there is involved *a looking away from every other ground of pardon, of salvation, of recovery* (H. E. I. 1944–1951).

2. We must look *under strong convictions of our helplessness and imbecility.*

3. Look to Jesus, *not only under a conviction of your insufficiency, but of His fulness* (H. E. I. 934–941).

4. We are to look *intently*, just as the beggar looks into the face of him who has the world's wealth around him; just as the shipwrecked seaman gazes in the face of him that has the means to rescue.

5. We must look *continually.* It

will not do to look at the Redeemer to-day, and to-morrow forget His existence and His claims; we must look to Him from first to last (P. D. 2313, 2314).

VI. WHO ARE PERMITTED TO LOOK TO HIM FOR SALVATION. (δ)

J Cumming, D.D.: "*The British Pulpit*," vol. i. pp. 321–334.

(α) There is no intended enriching of men with the titles, honours, incomes of earth; there is no intended extension of the span of mortality, or wisdom, or scientific attainments of man. These are beheld by the Creator of men as scarcely worth a moment's reflection, while everlasting concerns remain unknown and unravelled, or disproportionately felt by those whom they wholly concern. . . . If you saw your child sinking amid the waters of the deep, would you feel *that* the time for gathering pebbles to amuse him, or meditating schemes of improving his mind? Would you not rather dash into the waves, and at the risk of your life rescue the child from his perilous situation? Even so the Almighty sees that the short time that is measured out to humanity needs something better than trifles on which to expend itself.—*Cumming.*

(β) Men's regards have too often been tortured and twisted aside and directed to faith, to repentance, and to a vast variety of preparations for learning and living on Christ, instead of being summoned, without restriction and delay, to Christ the Saviour, who is the dispenser of these most precious graces, not the requisitionist of their previous existence. When you are told to look to repentance, to faith, to previous reformation of any kind, you are told to look to an idol, and you stand as far off from the true worship of Jehovah as they who bend the knee to Baal, or they that did homage to the stones, and images, and paintings in the Roman Pantheon. When Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection, many of his auditors supposed that he proclaimed two distinct and equal Deities; and many still, when we preach Christ, repentance, and faith, suppose, though they allow it not, that we preach separate Saviours, to any of which they may look and be saved. . . . Does not the Scripture declare most pointedly, that Jesus is "exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins." And does not this imply that we must look to Him before we can repent? Man may sorrow when he looks back upon the threatenings of the law of God, and fear and tremble when he looks forward to the awful punishment of hell; but repent, in the Scriptural sense, he never will, till he look to Jesus. Repentance is in fact the expression of a changed heart, the fruit of being born again. —*Cumming.*

(δ) H. E. I. 379, 381.

We hold the doctrines of election and of predestination to be scriptural and precious truths; but if a man will make these drags upon our efforts to proclaim the everlasting Gospel, and dampers on our zeal in the cause of perishing souls, we will stand up for their defence, and maintain that these doctrines are desecrated and abused, and instead of being, as meant, consolations to all true believers, are made barriers in the way of heaven's going forth to recover the lapsed children of Adam, and to rescue the heirs of eternity from going down to perdition. We are to act upon the principle that there is sufficiency in Christ for all; that His blood can wash the most inveterate stains of guilt; and we are to bound its saving efficacy by nothing short of the limits of the globe.—*Cumming.*

LIFE FOR A LOOK.

xlv. 22. *Look unto Me, and be ye saved, &c.*

The precious truth contained in this statement has been put in this memorable form: "We have here the greatest possible blessing, for the greatest possible number, under the best possible guarantee, and on the easiest possible terms." While we proceed along these lines, let us breathe the prayer that God would remove the scales from blind eyes, and unstop deaf ears, that His message of grace may be understood and believed.

I. THE GREATEST POSSIBLE BLESSING. Moses was instructed to make a serpent of brass, and set it upon a pole, "that every one that was bitten, when he looked upon it, might live" (Num. xxi. 8). Life and salvation are the same thing, for life is salvation from death, and no blessing can bear comparison with this. A patient may have every attention, but there is one blessing he earnestly desires—to have his life spared, his health restored. The shrieking passengers in wild commotion on that burning ship are seeking one thing—to save their lives. And the most urgent need of the soul is life. Every other blessing is included in this salvation. Your sins

expose you to the curse of the law; but Christ has redeemed you, being made a curse for you. What greater blessing can there be? It is not mere deliverance from punishment, but also the rectification of your disordered spiritual nature. Nothing deserves the name of salvation which does not purify the heart. Salvation is complete and final (Mark viii. 36).

II. FOR THE GREATEST POSSIBLE NUMBER. "All ye ends of the earth," "every one that is bitten," however far gone he might be. What a significant emblem of the Cross in its far-reaching efficacy (John iii. 14, 15). Some years ago a terrible story came from sea. Fire was spreading fast along the decks, and left only two boats available for the 477 souls on board. These were soon filled, leaving the large number for whom there was no accommodation to the alternative of death by fire or water. In this fearful plight the captain first threw his wife overboard, and then himself plunged into the waves. If the lost family of mankind were placed in similar circumstances with respect to the salvation of the soul, many of us might with reason plunge into the deeps of despair; but, blessed be God, there is room for all. "All ye ends of the earth." Where can you go to be beyond the sweep of these words? To what end of the earth can you retire where this voice will not reach? (Prov. viii. 4). There is only one place where it is not heard. It does not run, "All ye ends of hell;" but you are still in a world of hope.

III. UNDER THE BEST POSSIBLE GUARANTEE. "For I am God, and there is none else." The serpent on the pole was no human device. It was the Divine method of recovery to the suffering Israelites. Moses might have said, How can healing come from a serpent of brass? but he stumbled not through unbelief. God's ways are not our ways. Jesus was lifted up to draw all men unto Him. Despise the Cross, and there is no other way of recovery, for this is God's way. If He guarantees life and salvation, who shall gainsay or oppose His will? Here, then, is the highest possible security. The Almighty gives us eternal life through His Son, and signs the deed with His own hand. Anything short of this would be unworthy of our confidence; but when a faithful God thus binds Himself, we may surely rest on His word. It is no hazardous speculation in which we are called to embark; no doubtful venture, for the highest authority in the universe has pledged His honour and faithfulness to make it sure.

IV. ON THE EASIEST POSSIBLE TERMS. "Look unto me." We have but to look to Christ to save us; to depend on Him for salvation; to use a good Scotch word, we have to "lippen" all to Him. He has died to secure your salvation. Why, then, should you distrust Him? Look away from your poor sinful selves, away from all your feelings and strivings, to Him the one source of salvation (John iii. 36). Nothing can be easier, and it has been made thus easy to be within the power of all. We make it difficult by our prejudices, our ignorance, our despair. There is no deficiency in the provisions of the Gospel. All things are ready. Yet there is room. You dare not doubt the efficacy of the Redeemer's sacrifice, nor question the boundlessness of His love. Nor can you plead that you are too sinful to be forgiven. Were you not sinful you would need no salvation. It may be you try to make yourself better before you look to Him; but you cannot make yourself better except by looking to Him. The longer you refuse to look the worse you will become. Come to Him as you are, sinful and wretched, and He will take you as you are (John vi. 37).—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

It is to the second person in the Godhead—to our Lord Jesus Christ—that we are to look (John iii. 14, 15). In the language of metaphor, the mind, as well as the body, has eyes. We say, "Look at this fact; look at

this or that other historic personage—at Julius Cæsar, Luther, Abraham;" and we all understand what is meant when such language is employed. It is in some such way that we are told to look at the Saviour.

I. If you look unto the Lord Jesus, you will see *God manifest.* How shall we find out the Almighty unto perfection? How shall we know the dispositions and character of that great Being with whom our eternal destiny is linked far more intimately and enduringly than with the dearest friend of our bosom? Philosophy answers: "In nature" (H. E. I. 361). But the Gospel replies: "You will see Him better still in Jesus Christ" (H. E. I. 847, 855–857, 1495–1497, 2243).

II. You will see not only God manifest, but *Divine love incarnate.* According to the medium through which it shines, the same light gives a radiance of a very different colour and influence—it cheers or depresses; through a a clear or gold-tinted glass of a lantern it sheds a bright and summer-like ray, through a blue glass of the same lantern it darts a cold, pallid beam. In a sinful world like this, we could easily imagine an awful incarnation from which the Divine attributes should have shone out upon us cold, lurid, or ghastly, just as they do when viewed through that sin-smoked glass which guilt holds up when it tries to look upon God; an incarnation in which the vindictive attributes of the Almighty had come on errands of severity into the midst of our sinfulness. But what was the actual fact? (John i. 14, iii. 17). Look to Jesus, and you will see that God is love.

III. Looking unto the Lord Jesus, there is yet another sight with which the penitent sinner is regaled, and that is *righteous reconciliation.* We behold a Saviour who so completely made satisfaction for us that God's very righteousness is declared in the remission of the sinner's transgressions. The Son of God offered a sacrifice so infinitely acceptable that no other offering, no further supplementary sacrifice on the part of the sinner, nay, nor on the part of the Saviour Himself, will ever be required. Now forgiveness is offered to each one of us. Do we accept it? God has set forth His Son as a propitiation for our sin, and whenever the sinner puts forth as his plea, that Christ hath died, the controversy is ended, and God sees no iniquity in the now humble and penitent transgressor. This is the atonement, *the at-one-ment:* God pacified toward the sinner, and the sinner reconciled to God by the peace-speaking Cross.

IV. Whoever looks at the Saviour long enough, *will find life transmitted from Him into his own soul.* The moment that God's injunction is obeyed, and the sinner casts himself on Christ for salvation, that moment he is safe; but it may be a long time before he can realise his safety—before the blessings of the Gospel, which are actually his, are also his in conscious possession. When the serpent-bitten Israelite obeyed God's command, and gazed at the serpent of brass, he lived; in that very look the virus of death was miraculously countervailed, and his recovery began. But just as you can imagine the anguish so intense that one moment could not charm it into ease and ecstasy—nay, the smart so keen that the stings which had been received would mingle for a time with the throbs of convalescence, and in half-slumberous moments the patient might dream that he was still death-doomed; so when you reflect what a malignant malady is sin, how deep it has dug its fangs into our inmost nature, and how long we have been tossing in its consuming torture, you can scarcely wonder that the surviving smart or the returning twinges of the old death-stroke sometimes startle the believer, and make him question if he can be really recovered, or dread a fatal relapse. But what would you have advised the man in such a case to do? To look again, look constantly, eagerly, till every qualm of doubt, every fear of death was drowned in the tide of transmitted life and healing. And you who still feel the

comfort of the old disease, and fear lest the ancient wound should fester afresh and kill your soul at last, look again steadfastly, solely, unto Jesus Christ. As in the old miraculous cure, through the gazing eye health flowed into the poisoned blood, and passed into the twinging nerves; so through the eye that fixes trustfully and lovingly on the Lord Jesus—God's beloved Son and the sinner's propitiation—renovation flows into the corrupt nature, and comfort into the wounded spirit, till by and by recovery mantles on the cheerful countenance, bounds in the obedient step, and swells out in the psalm of thanksgiving.

V. If you look to Jesus as God reveals Him in His Word, and as He is in Himself, you will see *a Saviour who, when He attracts your love, will assimilate your life to His.* If you look to a right purpose, and long enough and simply enough, you will not only get sensible, but visible salvation; that is, you yourself will look like one who has looked to Jesus (2 Cor. iii. 18).—*James Hamilton, D.D.: The Penny Pulpit*, No. 1713.

Christ's Dominion.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

xlv. 23. *I have sworn by Myself, &c.*

To "bow the knee" is to render homage as to a king. To "swear" is formally to accept and profess allegiance. It supposes a monarch. The text finds its fulfilment in Christ, and is applied to Him (Rom. xiv. 11; Phil. ii. 9–11). It sets forth the glory of His dominion.

I. The righteousness with which it is constituted.

By His Godhead, He has a right to the allegiance of all His creatures. His dominion over them can never be relinquished. When such as have rebelled return to their allegiance, they restore the right which has been unjustly withheld.

But He has acquired the right of supremacy over the mediatorial kingdom by His mediatorial work. His death on the Cross acquired it. The passage already named from the Epistle to the Philippians, with others, traces the Redeemer's exaltation to His atoning death. One who has well executed the earlier stages of a great work is likely to be entrusted with its completion. Joseph was the most likely to carry into effect the plans he had indicated to Pharaoh.

II. The Universe to which it will be extended.

The terms here and elsewhere are universal. The corresponding passages enter into detail. They specify the world, heaven, the unseen realm of spirits.

1. The inanimate and irrational parts of creation are unconsciously subordinated to His authority. The dominion over the inferior creation was given to the first man. It was weakened by the Fall. Restored and realised in Christ (Ps. viii. 4–8; Heb. ii. 6–9). It will be consummated at the resurrection (Rom. viii. 19–23). They are mixed up with man from the beginning. Therefore subordinated to Christ.

2. The holy and the renewed parts of the universe are willingly subordinated to His authority. (1.) *Holy angels* (Isa. vi. compared with John xii. 41; Ephes. i. 20–23). They ministered to Him on earth. Would have come in legions to save Him from death, had He willed. An army always at His command. They are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. Beautiful doctrine of their perpetual environment. It is a consolatory thought in perilous crises. (2.) *Renewed men.* His dominion over them is a spiritual dominion. He reigns in their hearts. Because of

what He has done for them, and because of what He is, they love Him. Therefore they willingly subject themselves to His authority. They are zealous for His honour. They stand up for Him against the world's hostility.

3. The hostile and impenitent part of mankind will be eventually subordinated to His authority. Prophetic Scripture is full of the idea of a universal reign of righteousness in this world through the universal prevalence of the Gospel. Ignorance will be dispelled; idolatry will disappear; indifference and unbelief will be destroyed; sin, if not extinct, will be hated; peace and righteousness will be the universal characteristic of mankind; primitive purity will be combined with high civilisation. The poetry of the Bible description of the latter day is well worthy the attention of all who are interested in the progress of mankind and in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ (H. E. I. 979–1162).

III. THE CERTAINTY WITH WHICH IT IS ASSURED.

The text is the strongest form of asseveration. It rests on the word of God which cannot be recalled or falsified, and on the oath of God which He sometimes uses for confirmation. On certain solemn occasions, when the greatness of the blessing and the difficulties in the way of its realisation rendered it desirable, He has confirmed His word of promise by a solemn oath (Gen. xxii. 16, 17). Thus here. And this word is being fulfilled:—

1. *In the mission and work of Christ.* In order to its fulfilment, He became incarnate, lived His life on earth, offered the sacrifice of Himself. This is the power which is destined to attract all men to Him. He is exalted to the throne, where He reigns until all His enemies shall be subdued.

2. *In the dispensations of His Providence.* In the exercise of His royal authority, He gave the command to preach the Gospel; a command which is permanently binding on His disciples. He opens doors of entrance in every part of the world; in India, China, and many other countries now, as in the Roman empire at first. He fills the Church with requisite power. Men are raised up with Christ's love in their hearts and a sacred willingness to enter these doors. Money is placed in the possession of the Church sufficient for the occupation of the fields of usefulness that are from time to time opened. It is His will that by means of His Church the prediction shall be accomplished.

3. *In the work of the Holy Spirit.* Whatever of sovereignty must be assumed in contemplating the principle on which the Holy Spirit is bestowed in order to the world's subjection to Christ, it is certain that as much of the Spirit is bestowed as the Church is at any time prepared for by labour, prayer, faith.

Now all this is in the course of being accomplished. It seems slow. Creation was slow. Almost all great works are accomplished slowly. Yet it is really proceeding. See how the principles of the Gospel and the men of the Gospel are leavening society. Our duty is clear. Bow the knee to Christ. Believe in Him. Work for Him. Support His cause. Pray for its extension.—*J. Rawlinson.*

THE FUTURE TRIUMPHS OF THE GOSPEL.

xlv. 23, 24. *I have sworn by Myself, &c.*

These words announce—

I. A UNIVERSAL SUBJECTION. "Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear."

1. "I have sworn by Myself." It is implied that God has a right to this subjection. This right is peculiar and perfect; superior to that of any master to a servant, or a sovereign to a subject, for God has an entire and absolute

property in us all. Our very existence is owing to Him. We breathe His air, eat at His table, wear His apparel, and are daily living upon His bounty. If He were to call you to Him, and say, "Take that thine is, and go thy way," what would you take? You could not take even yourself, but would relapse into non-existence (Acts xvii. 28).

2. This submission is not natural. "Unto me *shall* every knee bow, and every tongue *shall* swear." Their previous condition was a state of alienation and rebellion. The Bible, throughout, assumes that this is man's present state (H. E. I. 3390–3396).

3. This submission is to be universal. "Unto me *every* knee shall bow, *every* tongue shall swear." Christ had no doubt that His kingdom, though small in its commencement, would spread far and wide (Matt. xiii. 31–33). Hitherto the progress of Christianity has been comparatively small, and its success much confined. There is no country, or town, or village, where even the majority are as yet governed by it. But it is not to be so always (Ps. lxxii. 11; Zech. xiv. 9; H. E. I. 979).

4. This submission is Divinely assured. How strong is the pledge here given! "By Myself have I sworn. The word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return." If it be a righteous thing for God to do, He will do it. Some of God's words have returned to Him, but they were threatenings, and threatenings are conditional (*e.g.*, Jonah iii. 4). But here the engagement is absolute: it is nothing less than an oath. But was it necessary for God thus to bind Himself down? No; but "an oath for confirmation is an end of all strife," "wherein God, willing therefore to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things"—for His *word* is as immutable as His oath—we might be encouraged to look forward with confident hope to a brighter future for our world.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS SUBMISSION IS TO BE EXEMPLIFIED. "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength; even to Him shall all men come."

This shows us that that universal homage is to be eventually paid to God in Christ. For it is with God in Christ that we have to do (John v. 22; Phil. ii. 9–11).

"Even to Him shall all men come." To whom should men go for help, but to Him in whom all power is to be found? If there were but one well in a neighbourhood, all the inhabitants around would flock to it for water. If there were only one refuge from a cruel and victorious enemy, thither would all the people hasten. When the famine was in Egypt and the surrounding countries, Jacob said in effect to his sons, "Go unto Joseph; he is in possession of the corn." All that these symbols set forth is to be found in Christ. "To Him," said dying Jacob, "shall the gathering of the people be."

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF REFUSING TO SUBMIT TO OUR MERCIFUL KING. "And all that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed."

1. It seems strange that such characters as these could be found; yet such is the case (Ps. ii. 2, 3). You are mistaken, if you suppose that the men of the world will love and admire your religion. They hated its Founder, not only "without a cause," but for the very excellences He displayed. Heathen philosophers thought that if Virtue appeared incarnate, all the world would fall in love with her. It did appear; thirty-three years "the image of the invisible God" was seen going about "doing good,"—and what was the result? The men of the world pursued Him with remorseless malice, and hung Him on a tree!

In like manner, the Church of Christ was opposed by them from its earliest commencement. They employed every kind of persecution against His cause and disciples. So it is still. In every self-righteous character there is a settled opposition against the sovereignty and grace of God (H. E. I. 2677–2679).

2. The future of these foes of Christ. "All that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed" (Rev. xvii. 14; Isa. lx. 12; Luke xix 27). "*All*," whether high or low, the moral as well as the profligate. "*All!*" There may be many of them, but though hand join in hand, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished. Their multitude will not afford any alleviation to their misery. "The way of transgressors is hard" ever here, and it leads down to the chambers of eternal death. But there is a Saviour able and willing to save the chief of sinners, and who will in no wise cast out any who come unto Him."—*William Jay: Sunday Evening Sermons*, pp. 33–40.

Righteousness and Strength.

xlv. 24. *In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.*

One distinguishing praise of the Gospel dispensation is its completeness. All the spiritual wants of those who embrace it are therein provided for. This completeness is all in Christ. In Him are all the believers' supplies treasured up; out of His fulness they must daily receive "grace for grace." The great variety of their necessities, and of His gifts, may be reduced to the two mentioned in the text. All they want is a title to heaven, and a qualification for the enjoyment of it; whatever gifts comprehend both these, comprehend all they can require; and righteousness is their title to heaven, strength secures their meetness for it.

I. **In the Lord the Believer has Righteousness.** In himself, he has none. There is hardly anything more plainly taught in Scripture than this. Nevertheless men are apt to suppose they have a righteousness of their own—a righteousness of the law. Such a righteousness St. Paul had at one time: if you would learn what value he put upon it when he was instructed in the truths of the Gospel, read Phil. iii. 8–10. He counted such a righteousness loss, instead of gain. His prayer was, that in the last day he might be found, not in it, but in "that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." This is the only righteousness which will avail us anything *then;* and this the believer has in the Lord. It is this, because Christ is his. He has not wrought it himself: Christ has wrought it for him. But though he has not the *glory*, he has the *benefit*. The reward of righteousness is his also. Being justified in Christ, he shall also be glorified with Him.

II. **In the Lord the Believer has Strength.** In him dwelleth no good thing. He cannot produce from the stock of nature one truly holy fruit. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." What one action truly good and pleasing to God can enmity produce? The enmity must be first removed, and the *principle* of love implanted in the breast, before the *work* of love can proceed from it. Man, in his natural state, may imitate good actions, but his actions cannot be really good, however well they may look. The tree must be made good ere the fruit can be good. For this the Saviour's strength is necessary (John xv. 5: 1 Cor. xv. 10; Gal. ii. 20; Phil. iv. 13; H. E. I. 2391, 4080, 4081).

Thus simple and intelligible is our religion. It presents us with one great object, Jesus Christ; and bids us seek all we need in Him. In doing this day by day, lies the art of maintaining peace of conscience, and of acquiring a growing victory over every lust within and every foe without.

Practical Directions—

1. *Renounce all other righteousness but that of Christ.* Otherwise, you dishonour Him and injure your own souls. If you do not trust wholly to Christ's righteousness, on the ground of your acceptance with God, you do not trust it at all to any saving purpose (H. E. I. 1960, 2411, 2412). A

clearer vision of the law would show us that nothing but the righteousness of Christ can satisfy its demands.

2. *Renounce all dependence on your own resolutions.* So long as you trust in them, the offer of Christ's strength must be superfluous to you. What have your resolutions amounted to? To anything really holy and spiritual? And what has been the effect of them? How often have you carried them out? Have you not repeatedly failed to do so? Will you go on risking your eternal welfare on those expedients which already have failed you a thousand times? True holiness is within your reach, but not by any strength of your own. You must believe in Jesus for it, if you would be partakers of it in truth. And in Him *only* must you trust (H. E. I. 932, 933, 4766).

3. *Be diligent in making use of Christ for both righteousness and strength.* It is not enough that you renounce false grounds of peace and rejoicing. The work of every day must be to live on Christ, that by His righteousness you may have peace, hope, and joy; by His strength, victory and holiness. Does conscience trouble you? Endeavour to get a clearer sight of and a firmer hold on the righteousness o Christ (H. E. I. 1893, 1894, 3350). When worldly cares press upon you, when temptations beset you, when you find it very difficult to walk in the way of duty, lay hold on the Redeemer's strength. Practical Christianity is, from beginning to end, nothing else but living a life of faith on the Son of God. Let this one thing, then, be the business of every day. Every day brings its trials, its snares, its peculiar duties, its advantages, its opportunities—go forth to meet and use them only in the name and power of Christ. So each day will be a day of victory. To overcome the world is a great thing, a far greater thing than many suppose; but in the strength of Christ it shall be accomplished by the believer (1 John v. 4; Rom. viii. 37; H. E. I. 1078, 1098, 938, 945).—*John Fawcett, A.M., Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 74–89.

Glorying in the Lord.

xlv. 24, 25. *Surely, shall one say, &c.*

Even from the gospel of the Old Testament we may derive an answer to the interesting inquiry, "How can a man be just with God?"

I. The believer's source of salvation. The text contemplates men as sinful, *i.e.*, polluted, weak, and guilty; accordingly it describes the Lord as being—1. *The source of his "righteousness."* Both the principle and practice originate in the grace of God. And in every stage of the process "salvation is of the Lord" (John xx. 1–6; Eph. iv. 24; Phil. i. 11; Isa. xxvi. 12).

2. *The source of his "strength."* There is a wide difference between perceiving what is right, or even desiring to act aright, and actually performing the will of God. The Lord imparts the energy by which we *do* His will (Phil. iv. 13); the fortitude by which we *suffer* His will (Rom. v. 3–5); and the persevering and unconquerable firmness with which we sustain the attacks of our enemies (Rom. viii. 37). Strength, suited and proportionate, is promised (Isa. xl. 29; Deut. xxxiii. 25; Isa. xli. 10); and these promises are verified by the experiences of the faithful (2 Sam. xxii. 40; 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10).

3. *The source of his "justification."* Not personal and perfect innocence, for, Rom. iii. 23; but that state which results from forgiveness. Of this "the Lord" must have the "glory," for He has provided the *means* of pardon (Isa. liii. 6; Rom. iii. 25); He propounds the *terms* of pardon (John iii. 16; Rom. iii. 26); He bestows that grace by which we *obtain* pardon (Eph. ii. 8; Col. ii. 12); He grants the pardon desired (Rom. iii. 24, viii.

33; Col. iii. 13); He blesses with a sense of pardon (Gal. iv. 4–6); and He will attest their pardon, in a public justification of His servants at the last day (Rom. ii. 4–10; Matt. xxv. 34–40).

II. THE BELIEVER'S HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT. This is—1. The language of *humble confession;* of weakness and inability. The text may refer to the past and the present. 2. The language of *humble gratitude.* 3. Or the text may respect the future; and then, by way of anticipation, this is the language of *humble confidence* (2 Cor. i. 10). 4. This is also the language of *humble but exulting triumph* (Isa. li. 9–11; Rom. viii. 35–39; Ps. xxiii. 4; 1 Cor. xv. 55; Rom. ii. 7–10; Rev. i. 5, 6).

This language is rendered all the more striking by contrast, "all that are accursed," &c.; shall be confounded at their stupid infidelity, &c.—*Sketches of Sermons,* vol. iii. pp. 54–58.

THE SEED OF ISRAEL.

xlv. 25. *In the* LORD *shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory.*

I. WHO ARE THE SUBJECTS OF THIS PROMISE? "All the seed of Israel." To Jacob this name was first given, and you know how he obtained it; how he was knighted on the field of battle. It is a name of high honour: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel" [*i.e.,* a prince with God]; "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." The promise is to his "seed."

"The seed of Israel" may be viewed under two aspects. First, as Jews, the natural descendants of Jacob. They nearly always were, and are now, very far from being the people of God, unless by a national covenant. But the period will come when the veil will be taken away from their hearts, and this promise will then be fulfilled to them.

But there is another aspect under which we may view Israel. Observe the distinction which our Saviour makes when speaking of Nathaniel: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." In speaking of him as "an Israelite," He distinguishes him from men of other nations, and by calling him "an Israelite *indeed,*" He distinguishes him from men of his own nation (Rom. ix. 6). All along there were some in Israel who, like their ancestors, were partakers of faith and humility. These were peculiarly "the Israel of God," and the ground of their being so called was not their natural relationship to Jacob, but their spiritual relationship to him (Rom. ii. 28, 29). Therefore, if your hearts are circumcised—if you are renewed in the spirit of your minds—you are "the Israel of God" (Phil. iii. 3; Gal. iii. 29).

But who of this "seed of Israel" are entitled to the promise? All of them! "In the Lord shall all," &c.

1. The expression seems to imply *number.* Though the righteous have always been few when compared with the wicked around them, yet collectively considered, and when gathered out of all nations and tongues, they will be "a number which no man can number" (Heb. ii. 10, and especially Isa. liii. 11, "satisfied!").

2. It expresses *impartiality.* There is no difference here as to country, condition, or complexion (Rom. viii. 14; Gal. iii. 26–28). Children differ in age, size, strength, feature, but they form one and the same family. Before the time of harvest the wheat grows in various places, and is separated by hedges and walls, but when it is reaped it is carried home and gathered into the same garner, while no inquiry is made whether it grew in this enclosure or that. "All the seed of Israel" have one Father, are all included in the same eternal purpose, redeemed by the same precious blood, justified by the same grace, destined

to the same glory. Therefore you should love them all, and never be ashamed to hold communion with those with whom Christ holds communion.

III. WHAT IS THE SUBSTANCE OF THIS PROMISE?

1. *The dignity of the Benefactor.* "*In the* LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." Who is the person here spoken of? A very important inquiry. Wherever you see "the LORD" in capitals in the Bible, you are apprised of the word JEHOVAH in the original. This name is therefore applied to Christ; for it is certainly of Him that it is said in the preceding verse, "Surely shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness," &c. "Why, then, you would make Jesus Christ to be God?" No, I do not make Him to be so: I find Him to be so. And it is necessary that He should be so, for without this there could not be an all-sufficiency of worth to expiate our offences, or of power to save us from the dominion and pollution of sin. It is necessary for us that we should be able to say, "My Lord and my God!"

2. *The relation on which the blessedness here promised depends:* "*In* the Lord. Of this "*in*" much is said in Scripture (ver. 24; 2 Cor. v. 17; Eph. i. 3; Phil. iii. 8). Between Christ and all His people there was a virtual union before the world began, and there is now a vital and a visible union—a vital union, when they are enabled to receive and embrace Him by faith; a visible one, when they join His Church, and make a profession of His name. Not only is He the source of blessedness, but we can be partakers of it only by being *in* Him. A refuge is a place of safety, but you can be secure only by being in it. The ark preserved Noah and his family, but had they been out of it when the rain descended, they would have perished along with the unbelieving world; but "the Lord shut him in," and therefore he was preserved. Consider also our Saviour's teaching in John xv. 4, 5.

3. *The privilege here promised.* It takes in two things:—

(1.) *Justification.* "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory." Does this mean that they shall be justified from imputations and slanders? Yes, in a sense this may be implied, so that the Christian may say, "He is near to justify me" (see Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6). So Joseph and David were in due time cleared from the calumnies that were cast upon them. So shall it be with all God's people who have borne reproach for His sake (P. D. 3114).

But the greater blessing here promised is justification from *sin.* This is the blessing that descends on all believers in Christ Jesus (Acts xiii. 39; 2 Cor. v. 21). How was Christ "made sin for us?" By imputation only. Our sin was reckoned to Him, and He became responsible for the consequences (1 Pet. iii. 18). How are we made righteous before God? In the very same way. Christ's righteousness is reckoned to us, and in consequence of it we are absolved and justified. How far does this justification extend? For answer, see Rom. viii. 1; Jer. l. 20. All true believers in Christ are now "accepted in the Beloved," both as to their persons and their services, and are not only freed from the curse of the law, but are invested with a title to everlasting life.

(2.) *Exaltation.* The exultation of which our text speaks will be the natural result and expression of the exaltation which God has in reserve for His people. Poor, mean, despised, they may be now, but then the shout of a King shall be heard among them. Is that King ours? Let us never be ashamed now to own, to talk of, to publish Him in whom we then shall glory. Soon "He will come again to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in them that believe."—*William Jay: Sunday Evening Sermons,* pp 41–47.

The Difficulty of Delivering the Deluded from their Delusions.

xlvi. 1, 2. *Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, &c.*

I want to fix your attention on the point where this prophecy stops. In vision Isaiah sees the gods whom the mightiest nations had long worshipped manifestly enfeebled, unable to protect, not merely their worshippers, but also the costly images in and through which they had been worshipped. These, which had been reverently carried in solemn procession by their priests, he sees ignominiously included among the spoils of the conqueror, and packed in common with other spoil on his beasts of burden. The idols to which prayers and sacrifices had been offered, in the hope of thereby securing deliverance from the invader, he beholds carried away into a foreign land. And all that he saw in vision literally occurred. Doubtless he saw much more than this, but he says nothing more. He does not add, "And those that worshipped these captured idols worshipped them no more; they acknowledge that Jehovah is the only living and true God, and Him only do they serve." This he does not say, because he knew the idolaters would go on worshipping such images as those their own hands had made, and to which they had in vain offered prayers for deliverance. How strange that men should be guilty of such folly under such circumstances! But the folly has not been of rare occurrence. It is not yet a thing of the past. *E.g.*, Her Majesty's Hindoo subjects worshipping the very same gods whose help their fathers sought in vain when the power of Great Britain was being exerted for their subjugation.

What an extraordinary fact! What other fact is there behind it? For behind every extraordinary fact there is an explanatory fact. This, that *it is a supremely difficult thing to deliver the deluded from their delusions.*

I. Of this fact the history of idolaters is not the only illustration; there are others in almost every realm of human thought and action. 1. *The political realm, e.g.*, the delusion that "protection" is a good thing for a nation. 2. *The social realm.* How long it took to convince even a Christian people that *slavery* is an evil, a crime which Scripture condemns! In like manner, how difficult it is to deliver even intelligent Christian people from the delusion that *strong drink* used in "moderation" is a good thing, notwithstanding (1.) that they admit that to those who use it immoderately it is an evil thing; (2.) that it has been scientifically placed beyond dispute that alcohol is neither food nor fuel; that used in any degree it unnaturally and undesirably increases the work of the heart; and that there is no medical benefit that can be secured by it which cannot be secured by other drugs to which no such moral peril belongs; (3.) that more moral as well as material evil is caused by its use than by any other destructive force at work in society. In spite of the clear demonstration of all these things, many intelligent and religious people go on using alcohol without compunction of conscience! 3. *The scientific realm, e.g.*, the delusion that vaccination is an evil. 4. *The ecclesiastical realm, e.g.*, the delusion that connection between Church and State is necessarily a blessing to both, or that disestablishment would necessarily be mischievous. 5. *The religious realm, e.g.*, the delusion that Romanism is not a vast unscriptural and superstitious scheme. Its hold upon the Irish; upon many educated English people. Or the delusion that happiness of heart and peace of soul can be found in any other path than that of humble and earnest service of God—in the pursuit of wealth, or rank, or fame, or amusement. Or the delusion that those blessings can be secured by diligence in religious ceremonialism and stern

asceticism. Look where we will upon our fellow-men, we see parallels to that which struck us with surprise when we first looked upon idolaters who continued to worship idols the inability of which to help them had been placed beyond doubt.

II. In view of this fact, what are the duties that press upon us? 1. Honest personal examination of our own beliefs and practices (1 Thess. v. 21). 2. The maintenance of hope for the future of the great human family to which we belong. The fact we have been thinking about must not be allowed to smite us with despair. Difficult as it is to deliver the deluded from their delusions, one by one the delusions do lose their hold upon them—*e.g.*, idolatry to a large extent, witchcraft, slavery; and in the future truth will achieve still greater triumphs (chap. xlv. 23). 3. Consequently, it is the duty of those to whom any truth has been revealed to go on declaring it, in spite of the seemingly hopeless stupidity of most of those whom they address. By their faithful proclamation of it, they do really, however imperceptibly, further the dispersal of the mists and fogs in which the minds of their fellow-men are enshrouded, and hasten on the day when the unclouded light of truth shall shine upon all men. In that proclamation let us do our part!

God's Promise to His Aged Servants.

xlvi. 4. *And even to your old age I am He, &c.*

The design of this chapter is to caution the Israelites against the idolatry of the Babylonians, and to prevent their fears of any mischief which idol-gods could do. For this purpose, Isaiah describes the desolation Cyrus should bring upon Babylon, and foretells that he should carry captive their gods, who would be insufficient to help either their worshippers or themselves. And then God calls upon His people to consider whether He was such a god as these (vers. 4, 5). He reminds them of what He had already done for them in their formation and their support; that He had shown all the care and tenderness of a parent to them; and assures them that He would continue His care of them. But our text may have been particularly designed to comfort God's aged servants, who should live till near or quite to the end of the captivity; those whose eyes saw the ruin of the first and the dedication of the second temple (Ezra iii. 12). To comfort and animate their hearts who expected to die in a strange land, and were greatly distressed at the remembrance of Zion, God encourages them still to hope in Him. To God's ancient saints to-day we may lawfully apply the same promise.

I. God's promise to His aged saints.

1. God promises to support them under their burdens, and carry them through their difficulties. "I will carry you." The word signifies to sustain any pressure, or bear any burden. It intimates God's readiness to help them, when they seem likely to be overborne and pressed down. How many are the burdens of old age from without! From the world, which still hangs too much about them. Sometimes their circumstances are such, that they cannot get rid of its cares and hurries. Their fellow-creatures are often a burden to them. Those with whom they are obliged to have dealings are apt to take advantage of their decays to deceive them. Some in whom they place confidence disappoint them. Some from whom they have good reason to expect assistance, ungratefully forsake them. This is the most grievous burden, and would be too heavy for them to bear, were it not that "the eternal God is their refuge, and underneath them are His everlasting arms." Nay, events that in the vigour of life would have

given them little concern now hang as a heavy weight upon them (Eccles. xii. 5). Every little thing is ready to overset them, but God will carry them by supporting their spirits, and putting strength into them, so that they shall not faint and sink (Deut. xxxiii. 25).

2. He will comfort them under all their infirmities and sorrows. "I will bear." The word sometimes signifies, as the former did, to support and sustain; but more frequently, to *exalt* or *elevate*. It may denote lifting up the soul in joy or comfort; and so it may be considered as an advance upon the former thought. The aged need the fulfilment of this promise. The infirmities of nature come upon them apace; the senses grow weak; the active powers decay: they need the help of others almost as much as they did in their infancy. Often the faculties of the *soul* languish. Their relish for company, business, and pleasure is gone (2 Sam. xix. 35; P. D. 103, 113). Nay, they find their thoughts confused, their affection for divine things flags, and they cannot serve God with such fixedness of heart, such warmth of zeal and love as they have done. What they hear and read quickly slips away; and their minds are no longer easily impressed with divine truths. In these melancholy circumstances, God will bear and lift up their souls. He sometimes in a most wonderful manner strengthens the powers of the mind. Under the infirmities of nature, He will afford them the consolations of religion; elevate their minds above the trifles of earth and sense; strengthen their faith in His promises; and enlighten the eyes of their understandings, to see the glorious inheritance of the saints, and their own title to and qualification for it (2 Cor. iv. 16).

3. God will deliver them out of all their fears and tribulations. "Even I will carry you, and will deliver you." Many of God's aged servants, through the languor of their spirits or weakness of their faith, are continually distressed with anxious fears of poverty, of increasing afflictions, of the temptations peculiar to old age, of apostacy in their last days, of death. But the Lord will deliver them from all their fears, will strengthen their hearts, and will make them desire to depart and be with Christ (H. E. I. 322, 1602, 1642, 1643). And at length He will give them an everlasting release from everything painful and distressing (H. E. I. 1629).

II. REASONS WHY THEY SHOULD CONFIDE IN THIS PROMISE.

1. *He is your Maker.* "I have made," saith He, "and I will bear." GOD formed your bodies and souls. Why, but to communicate happiness to you, that you might serve Him on earth and be for ever with Him? He who freely gave you your life, will surely grant you every needful good (Matt. vi. 25). God made you: must He not therefore be a very wise Being? Must He not know all your needs, distresses, and fears? God made you: must He not therefore be a very powerful Being? Is there any evil so great that He cannot deliver you from it, any good so valuable that He cannot confer it upon you? (ch. xxvi. 4).

2. *He hath been careful of you and kind to you hitherto.* This is intimated in the text, which is a promise of *continued* care and favour; and it is plainly expressed in the preceding verse. Have you not reason to acknowledge, with aged Jacob, that the God of your fathers has fed you "all your life long" to this day, and redeemed you from evil? What stronger argument can there be to encourage your faith in His promises, than your long experience of His goodness? To distrust Him will be peculiarly unreasonable, and highly ungrateful. Holy men of old thought it a very substantial reason to exercise faith in God, that they had long experienced His care (Ps. lxxvi. 17, 20; 2 Tim. iv. 18). Hath God carried you sixty or seventy years, and will He cease His care and withdraw His kindness? How unreasonable such a conclusion! God hath been an old friend to you,

a tried friend, and you may be assured He will never leave nor forsake you; especially when you consider—

3. *He is an unchangeable God.* "I am He"—an expressive word elsewhere rendered "the same" (Ps. cii. 27). "I am He that I was of old to the saints in former generations, and will continue the same through every succeeding age, and not like the idols of the heathen, that were made yesterday, and are destroyed to-morrow." This renders God the proper object of our trust. Creatures change, but He is the same. When men grow old they often find that their friends forsake them; their old acquaintance look shy on them; their children sometimes turn their backs upon them; the world is almost weary of them, and wisheth them gone. But their God remains the same powerful, wise, and gracious Being, whose affection for His aged servants does not lessen. It was a remarkable saying of Cardinal Wolsey, at the close of his life, "If I had served my God as long and as faithfully as I have served my prince, He would not have cast me off in my old age." The unchangeableness of God adds the strongest security to His promises and covenant, and is a sufficient encouragement to His people to hope in Him, whatever changes and alterations there may be in the world about them (Ps. lxxxix. 34, xlviii. 14).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

1. *How unreasonable and unbecoming is it for aged saints to sink under their burdens and infirmities!* Be they ever so many and great, you have the promise of God to depend upon, that He "will bear, and carry, and deliver" you. We have seen that it is a sure promise. Therefore, instead of fretting and complaining in the midst of trial, plead it, and it will be fulfilled to you.

2. *Aged saints are under great obligations to God, and should be faithful unto death.* To Him you are under innumerable obligations as your creator, preserver, and benefactor. Therefore proceed vigorously in His service, and let not your infirmities be made an excuse for negligence and sloth (P. D. 2598). Labour to maintain the seriousness and spirituality of your devotions. Let your hoary heads never be spotted with any sin. If God gives you ability for active services, abound in them, for death is at hand. If you cannot do this, adorn and recommend religion by patience and resignation to His will, and by quietly waiting for His salvation. Glorify Him by calm faith in the final hour. I heartily wish your souls and mine may then be in the same frame as that of a pious Scotch minister, who, being asked by a friend during his last illness whether he thought himself dying, answered, "Really, friend, I care not whether I am or not; for if I die, I shall be with God, and if I live, He will be with me."

3. *Young persons should choose God as the guide of their youth, if they desire that He should be the support and comfort of their age.* If this great choice is not made in youth, it probably never will be made (H. E. I., 1457, 1458).—*Job Orton. S. T. P: Practical Works*, vol. i. pp. 373–382.

These words were addressed to God's ancient people in view of the time when Babylon would be brought to ruin. Bel and Nebo, its gods, would be carried away, unable to defend themselves. In contrast to them Jehovah, who had, like a mother, carried His people, would continue to carry them, through all the duration of their existence. To the end it would be as it had been from the beginning (Deut. xxxii. 11, 12). The words were spoken to the nation, but they contain a truth equally precious to every individual; and in this view we will consider them. We will notice

I. THE APPREHENSIONS THEY CONTEMPLATE. They are those incident to old age and its prospect. While no one can be certain that he will reach old age, no reflecting man can fail to think sometimes of the possibility that he may. At such times we remember several things, as that it is a period

1. *When a man's pecuniary resources are likely to be diminished.* Where an inheritance has been derived from ancestors, and where successful commercial enterprise has realised wealth, it is not so. Where it is possible to provide for old age, it is dutiful. But in the majority of cases, it is impossible. The family swallows up all. The decline of power to perform customary work means diminished income. This is the case of the labouring poor, and of many widows. Yet old age is the period of life when there is diminished ability to endure privation. The elasticity of youth rises above a change of circumstances; old age sinks under it. There is then a tendency also to greater anxiety about worldly comfort and sufficiency.

2. *When friendship is less available than in youth.* If poverty comes with it, it is too often found that "the world forsakes whom fortune leaves." Most of the friends of earlier days have gone whence there is no return; and there is neither equal disposition nor opportunity to make new ones. The old man feels himself becoming less important to the community. In private life he often becomes less capable of affording happiness. He may be garrulous; but it is about things not of present interest. Thus he is in danger of sinking into neglect; perhaps he is too sensitive, and fancies himself neglected and forsaken when it is not really the case.

3. *When the physical powers fall into decay.* It is not necessarily so with the intellectual and spiritual powers, which are often most vigorous in advanced life. But the body is like a house, it falls into ruin after a number of years. Its powers decline. Its capacity for action lessens. The enjoyment of existence departs.

4. *It is the period nearest to the hour of death.* True, death is also near the young; only to them he does not show himself so plainly. But he cannot be far from the old. Death stands before them; a dark enemy who must be faced; a dread moment when, amidst unknown suffering, all that has made life interesting must be left behind.

These gloomy anticipations crowd upon the contemplation of old age. Happy is it for those who in full faith can pray: "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth." To God the words of our text direct us. Notice

II. THE ANTIDOTE THEY ADMINISTER. "Even to your old age I am He: and even to hoar hairs will I carry you." They encouraged the exiled Jews to put their trust in the Lord. They may encourage us in the like manner in spite of the presence or the gloomy prospect of old age. He will be our God. He will lead and carry us through life to old age; and in old age will relieve the darkness by the brightness of His presence, the sufficiency of His power, and the tenderness of His love. The text reminds us of

1. *His permanent existence.* "To your old age I am He." His life runs through all ages and generations. The care of earthly parents gradually dies away as their children reach maturity. Parents usually die before their children. Should they survive until their children become old, they are themselves cast on the care of their children. However great his solicitude, no parent can guarantee that his own life will continue as long as his children need his care. But our heavenly Father will continue to exist through our lives and beyond. He can undertake the charge of His children to the end of their lives.

2. *His enduring ability.* "I will carry. . . . I will bear." The help rendered by any man may be discontinued from loss of ability. Human promises must be conditional on the continuance of ability. But God's ability suffers no diminution. You cannot survive His power to help.

3. *His unchanging purpose.* God says, "I will." It is a purpose formed in infinite wisdom. It will be executed with unfailing faithfulness. He will not change His mind as men sometimes do. The purpose is formed in the tenderness of unchanging love. Who can measure the duration of the

mother's love for the child she has carried in her womb? Long as life lasts, it is in her deepest heart. Even though he go astray, and others cast him off, the mother will not give him up. This is the love with which the Lord here says He follows His children, notwithstanding their numerous follies and faults (ver. 3). May we not regard this declaration as a sufficient antidote to the apprehensions we are apt to entertain in prospect of the various anxieties and inconveniences of advancing years?

You who are advanced in life can bear testimony to the Lord's faithful love, which has attended all your days. Have we not heard the aged speak in terms of satisfaction and thankfulness, notwithstanding the trials they have experienced in their life journey? (Ps. lxxi. 6, 15). See that you honour God to the end by trusting yourselves to His disposal.

You who are young, make the Lord your confidence from your earliest days. Friends, health, business capacity, opportunities may fail. Lean on One who is independent of changes. Make Him your friend. Say to-day, "My Father, Thou shalt be the guide of my youth."—*J. Rawlinson.*

The words "I am He" mean "I am still the same: I will not alter. My love will not grow cold, my care for you will still continue." The God of our youth and manhood will be the God of our old age, losing none of the tenderness with which He has guided us through previous stages. What a consoling promise! Though originally made to Israel, and applied to them in a national sense, each believer can make it his own (2 Cor. i. 20); and it is good for us, not only to rest on such a promise as we pass into the future, but to mark its fulfilment in our past experience, and in the experience of others who at life's close have borne testimony to the continued goodness, the sustaining power, the unfailing faithfulness of Him whom they trusted and served.

I. THE PERIOD OVER WHICH GOD'S CARE EXTENDS.—"Even to your old age," "to hoar hairs." *God engages to be our life-long Friend.* He will tend us all the way from infancy to old age, and *then* He will not forsake us. This golden thread of divine care runs through the whole web of our life, brightening its most sombre colours.

God engages, 1. *To be our Friend to old age.* Some of us may think we can dispense with His help on the way to old age, though when we reach it, with enfeebled powers and diminished comforts, we may be glad to have recourse to His help. But God's promise is larger than our poor thoughts. He takes us up in His supporting arms as soon as we draw our first breath, and never leaves us, if we do not leave Him, until we have drawn our last.

2. *To be our Friend in old age.* Having conducted us to this period, He will not cast us off (Ps. lxxi. 9, 18). Old age is often a time of feebleness and neglect, with few friendships and enjoyments, but with His presence and support we may be peaceful, serene, useful in it. Instead of being repulsive, as we often see it, it may be beautiful, attractive, and honourable in us (Lev. xix. 32; Prov. xvi. 31). It is pitiable to see an old man who has missed the object of life. "To pass out of the world in the world's debt; to have consumed much and produced nothing; to have sat down at the feast and gone away without paying his reckoning, is not, to put it in the mildest way, a satisfactory transaction" (*Earl of Derby*). Such a spectacle is not uncommon; but, even then, a change may come. "God can put a fresh kernel into an old and worn-out husk." The sun of God's favour may shine on the declining days of a life spent in the darkness of unbelief, but such a case does not fall within the scope of this promise. Only those whom God has guided *to* old age can count with certainty on His support and blessing *in* old age. Many an aged saint can testify to the continued goodness of God. Is old age a second childhood? God is a

tender parent, unwearied in His attention. Is it a time of diminished comforts? One great comfort is still left, all the more soothing when others are gone. Is the old man lonely, like the last leaf which the storm has left clinging to the tree? The life-long Friend still remains, "when other helpers fail and comforts flee." And the result is that the aged believer is often a "grand old man" still bringing forth fruit, counselling others from his ripe experience, cheered by happy memories and glowing hopes, not frowning on the happiness of others, contented, trustful, loving, kind.

"On he moves to meet his latter end,
Angels around befriending virtue's friend:
Sinks to the grave with unperceived decay,
While resignation gently slopes the way.
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,
His heaven commences ere the world be past."

—*Goldsmith.*

II. THE NATURE OF THE CARE WHICH GOD EXERCISES OVER US, expressed in the words "carry," "bear," "deliver," which stand in contrast to what is said (vers. 1, 2) of the idol-gods of the Chaldeans. Idolaters carry their gods, but our God carries us. Images are borne about in procession, or are packed up and laid on beasts of burden—a withering exposure of the folly of idol-worship (ver. 7). The same may be said of creature confidences. Earthly possessions, instead of a help, often become a burden and a snare. Trust in man is often met by faithlessness. Sinful pleasure proves a clog and a hindrance. Unable to support or deliver, these gods become burdens, drags, encumbrances which must be supported.

But these words express the character of God's care for us. He is both father and mother to us (Ps. ciii. 13; Isa. lxvi. 13; Ps. xxvii. 10). Expressive and tender though the image is, it does not fully exhibit His affection. Not only does He nurse us in infancy and childhood, but even to old age (Ps. xlviii. 14).

What deliverances, too, He works for us, from accident and sickness, from the burden of sin and the onset of temptation! How marvellous have been His patience with us and His providential care! He will preserve us in old age, and deliver us from death. To the Christian pilgrim old age will be a Beulah land whence he can descry the shining glories of the heavenly city.

III. THE ARGUMENT BY WHICH GOD ENCOURAGES US TO EXPECT HIS CONTINUED CARE. "I have made, and I will bear." As the Creator of our bodies and the Father of our spirits, God acknowledges His obligation to guide and care for us. Does an earthly father love his child, and shall not the Universal Parent care for the children whom His hand hath formed? The argument becomes stronger when addressed to those whom God has created anew in Christ (Ps. lvi. 13; cxxxviii. 8; Phil. i. 6). Behold, then, how gracious is our God! Not only does He assure us of His tender support all through life, but He also condescends to give us a strong reason for counting upon it.

In conclusion—1. *On this promise God rests His claim to our undivided trust.* If He engages to do all this, ought we not to give Him the entire confidence of our hearts, abandoning every refuge of lies? There is everything to invite our firm reliance (2 Tim. i. 12, iv. 18). 2. *There is a call here for gratitude.* God has brought some of you well on in your journey to old age, and will you not acknowledge His goodness? and you who have reached old age, are you not thankful for the mercies of the past? 3. *The subject inspires us with hope.* At whatever stage we stand in the pilgrimage of life, here is a voice of encouragement.—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

Old age most wish to attain, but those who reach it are generally disposed to complain about it. Very various are the circumstances and feelings in this period of life, but, with all who attain it, it is the time when their

"strength faileth;" and with numbers it is a time of gloom and sadness, of labour and sorrow. Caleb could say, "Now, lo! I am fourscore," &c. But how few can adopt this language!

I. Old age has its peculiar afflictions. 1. Physical deterioration (Ecc. xii. 1, &c.) 2. It is usually embittered by the recollection of many distressing bereavements. 3. How utterly forsaken and destitute are some of the aged! 4. Poverty is a frequent accompaniment of old age.—Such a termination of human life, when viewed apart from religion, is cheerless and melancholy. Religion, the best companion of our youth, is the only effectual support of the aged.

II. Old age has its peculiar duties. The foundation must be laid in those great principles of religion, "repentance towards God, and faith," &c. Until then you cannot possess a Christian character, nor can you experience the supports and consolations connected with it. Have you repented, &c.? If you have received the remission of sins, &c., let your mind be directed to those duties which arise from the peculiarity of your present circumstances. 1. Daily familiarise yourself to the thought of your approaching end. 2. Endeavour in the midst of your trials to cultivate a thankful disposition. 3. Guard against the temptations incident to your condition. 4. Earnestly seek after an increasing meetness for future and eternal glory.

III. Old age, when connected with piety, admits of many consolations. Consider—1. That there is nothing peculiar in the afflictions which you endure, or which need prevent the enjoyment of internal peace and comfort.

2. If old age has its afflictions, it has also its immunities. If the circle of your enjoyment is contracted, you have less to ensnare your affections, and draw you away from God, &c.

3. You have the promise of effectual support and of complete deliverance.

4. The nearness of salvation should reconcile you to affliction and death.

5. How blessed is your condition contrasted with that of the aged transgressor!—*T. H. Walker: Companion for the Afflicted*, pp. 309–335.

The God of the Aged.

xlvi. 4. *Even to your old age I am He, &c.*

I. The doctrine of the text I hold to be *the constancy of God's love, its perpetuity, and its unchangeable nature.* God declares that He is not simply the God of the young saint or the middle-aged saint, but that He is the God of the saints in all their ages from the cradle to the tomb. "Even to old age I am He;" or, as Lowth beautifully and more properly translates it, "Even to old age I am the same, and even to hoary hairs will I carry you."

1. That God Himself is unchanged when we come to old age, surely I have no need to prove. Abundant testimonies of Scripture declare Him to be immutable. If we need proofs, we might look even abroad on *nature*, and we should from nature guess that God would not change during the short period of our mortal life. Had God changed, we should need—(1.) *A new Bible.* But the Bible which the child readeth is the Bible of the grey head. (2.) *A new form of worship.*

That God is still unchanged, we learn *from the sweet experience of all the saints.* They testify that the God of their youth is the God of their later years. They put their trust in Him, because they have not yet marked a single alteration in Him.

2. Not only is God the same in His nature, He is *the same in His dealings:* He will *carry, deliver*, and *bear* us the same as He used to do. God's promises are not made to ages, but to people, to persons, and to men.

II. Consider the time of old age as a special period, needing manifestations of the constancy of divine love.

1. Old age is a time *of peculiar memory.* In fact, it is the age of memory. What a peculiar memory the old man has! How many joys he can remember, &c. And yet, looking back upon all, he can say, "Even to old age He is the same," &c. How frequently has he been forced to exclaim, "Though friends have departed, yet there is a Friend who sticketh closer than a brother; on Him I still trust, and to Him I still commit my soul."

2. *Of peculiar hope.* The old saint hath few hopes of the future in this world; they are gathered up into a small space; and he can tell you, in a few words, what constitutes all his expectation and desire. But he has one hope, and that is the very same which he had when he first trusted in Christ; it is a hope of an inheritance that is "undefiled, that fadeth not away," &c.

3. *Of peculiar solicitude.* An old man is not anxious about many things, as we are, for he hath not so many things for which to concern himself. But (1.) he hath more solicitude about *his bodily frame.* He fears every now and then that the pitcher will be "broken at the cistern;" for "the noise of the grinders is low." But in this peculiar solicitude you have another proof of divine faithfulness; for now that you have little pleasure in the flesh, do you not find that God is just the same; and that, though the days are come when you can say, "I have no pleasure in *them,*" yet the days are not come when you can say, "I have no pleasure in *Him?*" (2.) There is another solicitude —a failure of *mind.* They forget much which they would wish to remember; but still they find that their God is just the same; that His goodness does not depend on their memory; that the sweetness of His grace does not depend upon their palate. (3.) The chief solicitude of old age is *death.* Young men may die soon. Old men *must* die. His one solicitude now is, to examine himself whether he is in the faith. But God's faithfulness is the same; for if he be nearer death, he has the sweet satisfaction that he is nearer heaven; and if he has more need to examine himself than ever, he has also more evidence whereby to examine himself.

4. *Of peculiar blessedness.* The old man has a good experience to talk about. He has peculiar fellowship with Christ. There are peculiar communings, openings of the gates of paradise, visions of glory, just as you come near to it. The nearer you get to the bright light of the celestial city, the clearer shall be the air. But all this only proves that Christ is the same; because, when there are fewer earthly joys, He gives more spiritual ones.

5. *Of peculiar duties.* (1.) *Testimony.* I remember hearing the late Mr. Jay. I fancy that if I had heard the sermon preached by a young man, I should not have thought so much of it; but there appeared such a depth in it because it came from an old man, standing on the borders of the grave; it was like an echo of the past, coming to me, to let me hear my God's faithfulness, that I might trust for the future. Testimony is the duty of old men and women; they should labour whenever they can to bear testimony to God's faithfulness, and to declare that now also, when they are old and grey-headed, their God forsakes them not. (2.) *Comforting the young believer.* No one is more qualified than kind-hearted old men to convert the young; when the young Christian comes to them, they say, "Do not fear: I have gone through the waters, and they have not overflown me," &c. (3.) *Warning.* The warnings of the old have great effect; and it is their peculiar work to guide the imprudent, and warn the unwary.

APPLICATION.—1. What a precious thought, young men and women, is contained in this text! Here is a safe investment. A rock may be dissolved, and if I build a house on that it may be destroyed; but if I build on Christ,

my happiness is secure for ever. How blessed it is to begin in the early morning to love and serve God! The best old Christians are those who were once young Christians. 2. You middle-aged men are plunged in the midst of business, and you are sometimes *supposing* what will become of you in your old age. But is there no promise of God to you that you *suppose* about to-morrows? Middle-aged man, give thy present years to Him. 3. Venerable fathers in the faith, and mothers in Israel, take these words for your joy. Do not let the young people catch you indulging in melancholy, but go about cheerful and happy, and they will think how blessed it is to be a Christian, for so will you prove to them—to a demonstration, that even to old age God is with you, and that when your strength faileth He is still your preservation.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 81–82.

"*Even to your old age, I am He.*" That is, "I am the same; I remain unchangeable, with the same tenderness, affection, and care." The proper study of man is God. Though apart from a divine revelation we may acquire some knowledge of His character and perfections, His full-orbed character is only to be found in the revelation He has been pleased to make of Himself in His Word. All things, &c., change; but God is ever the same. "I am He, the same yesterday," &c.

I. THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD. He is subject to no change whatever in His manner of being, His perfections, purposes, promises, or threatenings. Whatever He was millions of ages before the worlds were made, He is now; and what He is now, He will be for ever. That He is thus unchangeable is clear from—1. Reason; 2. Nature; 3. Moral government; 4. The repeated and explicit declarations of Holy Scripture (H. E. I. 2254, 2256, 2324, 2341).

II. SOME OF THE PRACTICAL LESSONS WHICH THIS DOCTRINE TEACHES.

1. *It furnishes encouragement to prayer.* The Atheist makes another use of this doctrine, and infers from it that it must be in vain to pray, because our petitions can produce no change in the divine mind. But this inference is as repugnant to sound reasoning as it is to the precepts of the Bible, and the spirit of piety (H. E. I. 2255, 3750–3753). If the Lord were fickle like earthly monarchs, then, indeed, it would be vain to pray, for He might grant a petition one day, and deny it another, or He might change His purposes and plans altogether. But if a prince promised to confer some great benefit upon a certain condition, and you knew his promise to be unchangeable, what man in the world would think of saying, "It is no use to seek the benefit, because it depends upon the fulfilment of a prescribed condition?"

2. *It encourages our personal confidence in God, amidst all the changes and decays of this mortal state.* We cannot trust a changeable being. God is worthy our utmost confidence, for He is immutable (ch. xxvi. 4). (a)

3. *It should stimulate us to seek freedom from all fickleness*—a steadiness of principle, purpose, action (Ps. lvii. 7; cviii. 1).

4. *It infallibly secures the punishment of the finally impenitent.* Every threatening as well as every promise must be fulfilled.

> "Faithful in Thy promises,
> And in Thy threatenings too."
>
> —*Alfred Tucker.*

(a) His people always need His protection and care, and He will never leave nor forsake them (Heb. xiii. 5). He who is the God of infancy and childhood will be the God of age. "The second childhood of man will find Him no less certainly a protector than the first." "Man travelling upon the road espies some great castle; sometimes it seems to be nigh, another time afar off; now on this hand, anon on that; now before, by and by behind; when all the while it standeth still unmoved. So a man that goes in a boat by water thinks the shore moveth, whereas it is not the shore but the boat that passeth away. Thus it is with God: sometimes He seemeth to be angry with the sons of men, another time to be well pleased; now to be at hand, anon at a

distance; now showing the light of His countenance, by and by hiding His face in displeasure; yet He is not changed at all. It is we, not He, that is changed. He is immutable in His nature, in His counsels, and in all His promises."—*Beveridge.*

The Lord's Care of His People.

xlvi. 4. *And even to your old age, &c.*

What a consolatory declaration—sufficient to silence all our fears, and to afford us quietness and peace for ever.

I. The objects of the Divine care.

1. The whole creation. God is ever present and ever active, and all the operations of nature are the manifestations of His living care (Psa. civ. 10–28; Matt. x. 29; Luke xii. 24, &c.) 2. More especially man—made in His image, formed for eternal existence, and endowed with capacities of eternal enjoyment. Even those who are unthankful and evil (Matt. vi. 45). 3. In a yet more special sense His own believing people (1 Tim. iv. 10). These He calls His "beloved," &c. None are overlooked or neglected. Remember your *individual* interest in the special care of your Heavenly Father.

II. The distinguishing characteristics of the Divine care.

1. It is most *tender*. "I will carry you, and I will bear." Surpasses the tenderness of a fond mother for her helpless infant (chap. xlix. 15). 2. *Active and effectual.* "I will deliver." He will accomplish that which concerneth us (chap. xiv. 24). His care is not an idle sentiment, but an operative principle, and being connected with almighty power, cannot exert itself in vain, but accomplishes with infinite ease all its purposes. Human care is often inefficient, for want of power, but with God to will is to perform, &c. 3. *Unwearied.* "Even to your old age," &c. Surpasses that of the most tender parent, which naturally dies away as the child reaches manhood. God's people are always the objects of His tender solicitude. Age does not make them less dependent, and experience only teaches them more and more their need of His sustaining grace. Human care is variable according to our changing circumstances and situations, but God's care is constant under all circumstances: affliction, temptation, &c.

III. The grounds and assurances of the Divine care.

1. *The relations He sustains to us* He is our (1.) Creator. "I have made you," and (chap. xliv. 2). Whatever motive induced Him to create us, still induces Him to care for us. (2.) Proprietor. He cares for His own lawful possession. (3.) Father. He cares for us with infinitely more concern than the very best earthly father. (4.) Redeemer (chap. xli. 14, &c.) The former arguments apply with double force. What greater proof can there be of His care? The cross is its measure.

2. *The teaching and promises of His Word* (Psa. ciii. 13; 2 Sam. xxiii. 5; Isa. xlix. 15; Heb. vi. 17, 18, &c.)

3. *The experience of His people* (Deut. xxxii. 7). Could we ask those who inhabit the celestial mansions, 'doth God care for His people?' they would all reply, with loud and grateful rapture, 'He doth care for His people,' &c. Those who are now on the way to heaven can testify to God's loving care. This is the most obvious and impressive evidence.

Conclusion.—1. The wonderful condescension of God (Psa. cxiii. 5, 6). 2. The obligations that rest upon us to love and serve Him who thus cares for us. 3. The privilege of casting all our "care"—anxieties—"upon Him who careth for us" (1 Pet. v. 7; Phil. iv. 6, 7). This is the universal heart's-ease—the only cure for care.(a)—*Alfred Tucker.*

(a) "Does my heavenly Father really care for *me?*" The words came from a lady sitting by an open window; her brow bore the trace of care and sadness; her eyes were suffused with tears. Within two years death had thrice

entered the home circle. The husband and two children, whose smiles made home happy, were sleeping in the graveyard near by. As her bereavement, her loneliness, her blighted prospects, recurred to her mind, she exclaimed, almost with a spirit that questioned its Maker's goodness, "Does my heavenly Father really care for me?" A servant girl, who perhaps scarcely knew she was doing anything for the Master, passed by the window singing:—

"Though waves and storms go o'er my head;
Though strength and health and friends be gone;
Though joys be withered all and dead;
Though every comfort be withdrawn—
On this my steadfast soul relies,
Father, Thy mercy never dies."

The cadences of those beautiful words, borne on the still summer air, found an echo in that stricken soul. She rose from her reverie of sadness, wiped away the falling tears, and looking not toward the silent tomb where bodies were crumbling to dust, but to the spirit-land whither her loved ones had gone, she said, with a faith she had never before known: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

The Human Cry and the Divine Response.

Psalm lxxi. 18. *Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not*
Isaiah xlvi. 4. *Even to your old age, I am He; and even to your hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.*

I. The cry of the aged saint in time of distress (Ps. lxxi. 18). 1. Aged saints are sometimes in distress. The Psalmist was, and others often are. Secular embarrassment, personal or family affliction, spiritual trials, &c. 2. Such distress has a tendency to weaken their confidence in God. To be God-forsaken implies utter loneliness, helplessness, friendlessness, hopelessness, agony.

II. The response of the covenant-keeping God (Isa. xlvi. 4). This promise to Israel is especially applicable to every aged Israelite.

1. *The purport of this gracious promise.*—God's perpetual presence with His people (Heb. xiii. 5). He will never abandon them to the caprice or malice of their enemies, or leave them to be the sport of circumstances. He will ever succour them under their trials. The promise guarantees God's constant presence. To direct by His wisdom; to protect by His power; to comfort, strengthen, and sustain by His Spirit; to supply all need by His all-sufficiency; to support in death by His rod and staff (Ps. xxiii. 4).

2. *The security of this glorious promise.* (1.) The character of God—Almighty, Faithful, &c. (2.) The mediation of Christ. "If God forgets His people, He must forget His own Son who stands continually before Him as a lamb newly slain, pleading, "Father, remember my people." (3.) The promises of His Word. "I will." Tried and proved in the experience of His people.

Learn: Contentment with the allotments of providence. Confidence in God (Heb. xiii. 5). Courage in view of death (Ps. xxiii. 4).—*Alfred Tucker.*

Old Age Transformed.

xlvi. 4. *And even to your old age, &c.*

I. Long life is promised as a blessing (Ex. xx. 12, &c.) Desired by most men, yet shrunk from by many of these in their meditative hours. Why? Because they see that to most people old age means—1. Diminished strength of body and of mind. 2. Physical infirmities and pains. 3. Increased needs, and yet diminished resources. 4. Increasing incapacity for enjoying the pleasures that remain to them (2 Sam. xix. 35). 5. The children who were their joy then causes of anxiety and sorrow (Gen. xlii.; Lev. x. 1–3; 2 Sam. xv. 30, xviii. 33). 6. Solitude continually increasing. 7. Exclusion from the services of the sanctuary (Ps. xlii. 4). 8. Diminished capability for usefulness. 9. A feeling that those round about them would be

glad to get rid of them.—In a word, TIME AGAINST THEM, more and more! So it may be with us, if we reach it.

II. *How are we to strip old age of these terrors, and transform it into a pleasant evening of life?*

1. A life of usefulness will go far towards it. But it is not safe to trust to this exclusively and too confidently. Men are ungrateful. They are also mortal. The generation we can now serve is passing away, and that which will *then* be round about us may know nothing of us.

2. A life of financial success will not accomplish it. The wealthy aged are apt to be haunted and irritated by consideration 9.

3. God only can enable us to accomplish it. It can be done only by laying hold of the promise of the text. —What a great promise this is? In it God engages to be our friend—(1.) *until* we have grown old; and (2.) *when* we have grown old.—Its fulfilment means the securing for us—(1.) The circumstances most needful for our true welfare. (2.) All the inward dispositions that will make us conquerors over our circumstances. (3.) The happiness that comes from ability to glorify God—in a different way, but as really as now.—This is a great promise, but God *can* fulfil it (Jer. xxxii. 19). And He *will* do it. Note the facts of which we are reminded, in order to help us to trust in Him. (1.) He made us, and having done this will not be likely to forget us, as children do the top they have made with great eagerness and glee. (2.) He has cared for us ever since He did make us: "Borne by Me from the birth, carried by Me from the womb!" And in His friendship there is no fickleness (Jas. i. 17).

Make the friendship of God *now* (H. E. I. 1457, 1458, 4246). Never let it go. So if old age is reached by you, you will find that you have indeed solved the problem of transforming it into a season of true blessedness.

THE CHRISTIAN'S OLD AGE.

xlvi. 4. *And even to your old age, &c.*

A life devoted to the service of God is a treasure of bliss, as abundant as the wants of the soul, as enduring as its immortality. The aged Christian must be happy,

I. *In contemplation of his past conduct and influence.* While there is here and there a page of sorrow in his history, it is contemplated *as a whole* with gladness. It contains the record of long years of allegiance and service—of many a purpose which had its origin in a love that embraced both God and man; of many a scheme of usefulness, &c. Happy the man!

II. *In the contemplation of the blessings which have marked his history.* Blessings both of providence and grace.

III. *In the contemplation of his life's history, because of the lessons it has served to teach.* Life is a school, and experience is a teacher. He has learned by a thousand proofs that "all things work together for good," &c.

IV. *In the continued possession of his life's chief good.* Not so is it with the ungodly. But that which the godly man chose many years ago as the chief portion of his soul, is still the light and joy of his being. Even amid the infirmities of age, his cup of happiness must be full.

"Age is not all decay; it is the ripening, the swelling of the fresh life within, that withers and bursts the husk."—*G. Macdonald.*

V. *In the near prospect of realising his life's brightest hopes.* Not so the aged transgressor. To the Christian the brightest and happiest period in his history.

Aged disciple of Jesus! be profoundly grateful.—*J. Guernsey: The American National Preacher.*

The All-sufficiency of God.

(*Sermon to the Young.*)

xlvi. 4. *And even to your old age I am He, &c.*

This is one of the promises of God. A minister in the last century collected all the promises of Scripture, and published them in a book by themselves, so that the Christian might consult them at all times and in all states. A wise thing to do.

The promise of the text will show you, if you live to be old, how God will be your friend in that needful time, if you put yourself in the way of the promise. "What do you mean by putting ourselves in the way of the promise?" This. If you are children of God through Jesus Christ, all His promises are your inheritance and estate. His promises are made to His friends; His threats to His enemies. If a man forgets God, and disobeys Him all his lifetime, it would be foolish to suppose that God intended His promises for him; it would be encouraging him in his sin, and others who are like him. Let us proceed with the text by way of question and answer.

I. *What has God done for us already?* He tells us, "I have made you." He seems to mention it with pleasure, then let me think of it with gratitude. Is my body fearfully and wonderfully made? Have I not an intellectual part, which distinguishes me from the brute creation? Have I not a soul which shall never die? You are paying attention, but it is not your bodies which are doing this. The inhabitant within peeps out at the windows of your body, sees and hears, is collecting knowledge on which it may live and be happy when the house of the body totters with age, and is crumbling into dust. The Psalmist says, "He has made me and fashioned me;" He has made me what is called a man. But there is a higher sense of the expression, "I have made." Has He made you a new man? (2 Cor. v. 17). Have you had a second birth? (John iii. 3). This second creation far exceeds the first; it is the best of God's works,—the creation of a Christian out of a mere man.

II. *What will God do for us in future?* He says, "I will bear, I will carry, I will deliver you." This implies weakness and inability in us, support and assistance from Him. Did you ever see a little child hanging upon its mother's gown, crying to be carried, and the cry answered with a kind word and many a kiss? It is thus God bears and carries His children in their journey, when fatigued with trials.—God delivers us *in* trouble. A state of trouble is a state of trial. It is mentioned to the honour of **Job** in his great affliction, that in all this he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. God delivers us also *by* trouble (Psa. cxix. 67).

III. *How long will God bear, carry, and deliver us?* To old age and hoary hairs. The Scripture calls age the needful time, and the evil days, when the heart shall say, "I have no pleasure in them." Then we are naturally deprived of many who took an early interest in our welfare. Where are the father, the mother, the friends, whose counsels guided our youth? They are gone, and we must soon follow them. Then, in our loneliness, we shall need the friendship of God. If you would have it then, you must seek it now, in your childhood, and live in it in your youth and your manhood. Cardinal Wolsey, the Minister of Henry VIII., was deserted and disgraced by the king in his old age. In the agony of his mind the Cardinal exclaimed, "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I have served my king, He would not have forsaken me in my old age." Serve God now, in the place of your service; and if you live to be old, He will perform to you the promise of the text; even to hoary hairs He will carry you, He will deliver you.—*George Clark, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 415–423.

Lessons of the Close of the Year.

xlvi. 4. *Even to your old age, &c.*

The end of the year brings home to us the fact that we are getting older.

I. *Acknowledge the fact of advancing age.* Not, if you can help it, in casting off the duties you owe to the world and the Church. Not by getting hard, gloomy, uninterested. Still, with a heart as young as ever, and even younger, look the fact of advancing age in the face. It is cowardly and unwise to blindfold yourself before a fact, however unpleasant it may be.

II. *Provide for advancing age.* Men do so in many respects. They insure, &c. These are well, but they are externals. Now, old age is driven more and more in upon itself. Clearly, then, the mind and heart and conscience should be prepared. It is well to have pleasant guests in the house, when we must stay almost wholly within doors.

III. *Ask all proffered comforters and guides if they will stay by you in old age.* "Even to," &c. There is no use for a pilot who will not conduct you to port; of a guide who will leave you at the most critical part of your journey. Business, pleasure, &c., do not meet that essential condition. God does, and He alone. He "made, and will bear." He redeemed, and will lead to perfect rest and joy.

IV. To those who are already old. *Remember that old age is near the confines of another world.* Prepare!—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. i. p. 319.

God Incomparable.

xlvi. 5. *To whom then will ye liken Me? &c.*

I. The doctrine taught by the prophet. Evidently that God is incomparable. He is so—

1. *In the splendour of His perfections.* He is self-existent, omnipotent, &c. (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; Ps. lxxxiii. 18; P. D. 1502, 1508). "Who by searching," &c.

> "This awful God is ours,
> Our Father and our Love,
> He will send down His heavenly powers,
> To carry us above."—*Watts.*

2. *In the universality of His dominion.* "Created beings have only a limited and confined sway, but God's kingdom 'ruleth over all.'"

3. *In the transcendence of His beneficence.* He is "abundant in goodness and truth" to all, even to the unthankful and evil (Matt. v. 45), but His believing people are the special objects of His munificent grace (1 Tim. iv. 10). They have "a peace that passeth all understanding" (Phil. iv. 7); a "joy unspeakable," &c. (1 Pet. i. 8); a hope blooming with "immortality and eternal life" (Rom. xv. 13); and the glory reserved for them is so great that "it doth not yet appear" (1 John iii. 2).

II. The sentiments it should incite in us.

1. The deepest *reverence* for God (Ps. lxxxix. 7). Where this does not prevail, there is no true worship.

2. The profoundest *attachment* to God (Ps. xviii. 1).

3. The sublimest *confidence* in God (Ps. xlvi. 1–7). He is infinitely worthy of our confidence.—*Alfred Tucker.*

The Character and Sinfulness of Idolatry.

xlvi. 5–9. *To whom will ye liken Me? &c.*

Its prevalence has been common to every age and to every people.

I. The character of idolatry.

1. It is the greatest dishonour that can be put upon God. It is the open denial of His supreme authority and

exclusive claim on the worship of His creatures. It is the utterance of a falsehood against all His attributes. The number of the gods worshipped is a lie against His unity; their corporal character is a lie against His pure spirituality, &c.

2. It is connected with all that is debasing to the mind and character of its votaries. This debasement is its natural effect. Its worship is vicious. Its system of human sacrifice—degradation of woman and the sacred institution of marriage—infanticide. Hence idolaters are degraded in intellect, polluted in heart, miserable in life.

II. THE SINFULNESS OF IDOLATRY. This appears—

1. *In God's hatred of it.* His perfections require Him to hate it. His language concerning it, and His conduct towards those who commit it, as recorded in His word, exhibit the detestation in which it is held in the divine mind (Jer. xiv. 4, xvi. 18; Ezek. viii. 6; 2 Chron. xv. 8; Ezek. xvi. 26; 1 Pet. iv. 3). His hatred of it appears in His prohibition of it (Ex. xx. 3, &c.), and in the threatened punishments connected with it (Deut. vii. 2–5, &c.)

2. *In God's earnest and repeated entreaties to the Jews not to commit it* (Jer. xliv. 4, &c.) These entreaties are the expressions of—(1.) His regard to His own glory. He is jealous of His honour. (2.) His compassionate desire for the welfare of those to whom He speaks. He does not look with unconcern upon them.

CONCLUSION.—These considerations furnish the strongest motives to missionary enterprise and zeal.—*J. Johnston, M.A.: Sermons*, pp. 336–360.

THE TWO-FOLD REVELATION OF GOD.

(*For Trinity Sunday.*)

xlvi. 9, 10. *I am God, and there is none else, &c.*

Between the Old and New Testaments there is essential doctrinal agreement. The older revelation prepared the way for the newer, while the newer is the fulness of the older. The New Testament writers assume the Divine inspiration and authority of the Old. They refer to institutions, incidents, and historical characters in the Old as illustrating, confirming, or enforcing their own instructions.

The Jew and the Infidel would possess an immense advantage, if the two parts of Scripture were in essential disagreement. If they made opposite representations of the Divine character, both could not be true. The Supreme would not contradict Himself about Himself. In the literature of the day we sometimes meet with references to the God of the Jews as different from the God of the Christians; so that it is worth while to show that they are one and the same (H. E. I. 633–635).

The Divine existence is assumed. When a sovereign makes a treaty with a distant nation, he does not, in any part of it, announce his own existence. It is already known. "The invisible things of Him from the creation are clearly seen—even His eternal power and Godhead."

But nature cannot teach everything we desire to know respecting God. It leaves us longing for further information which it cannot supply. Divine revelation supplies it. God has condescended in His Word to reveal Himself. What may be gathered from the two parts of Scripture respecting the Divine nature?

I. THE DIVINE UNITY. When revelation has been absent, men have glided into polytheism and idolatry. To the numerous effects of Divine power they have assigned separate divinities. Finding themselves ignorant and sensuous, they have persuaded themselves that worship can be best maintained by representations of these divinities in wood, stone, silver, and gold. Hence the testimony of Judaism to the unity and spirituality of the Divine nature (Deut. vi. 4; Isa. xliv.

6). By the first preachers of the Gospel these points were emphasised in opposition to the polytheism and idolatry of the Greek and Roman world. They demanded that men should turn from dumb idols to serve the living and true God.

And yet it is a unity that is consistent with the idea of Trinity. It is in accordance with the idea of Old Testament Scripture to prepare the way for the fuller revelation of truth in the New, rather than complete the revelation. The names of the Divine Being are put in the plural number although associated with singular verbs. The determination to bring the human race into existence is announced in the plural form: "Let Us make man." The wonderful and mysterious Angel of the Covenant appears on several special occasions. In many passages the phrase, "the Spirit of the Lord," occurs as descriptive of attributes, qualities, and acts which belong to a Divine Person. In ch. lxiii. 10 the three persons of the Godhead seem to be mentioned. In the New Testament, while there is a similar distinctness of testimony to the Divine unity, there are still clearer intimations of the Divine Trinity. The Father is spoken of as God; so is the Son; so is the Holy Spirit. There is the formula of baptism. There is the Apostolic benediction. There is the place of each in the economy of redemption (H. E. I. 4816-4821).

II. THE DIVINE HOLINESS. We find the same teaching in both Testaments respecting this. Essentially separated from evil, He hates it, and delights only in what is pure. Old Testament presentations of this great fact (Lev. xix. 2; Isa. vi. 3, &c.; H. E. I. 2275). Thus the New Testament, representing the Divine redemption as intended to restore its subjects to the pristine image of God, exhorts Christians to seek after holiness (1 Pet. i. 15, 16; Eph. iv. 24). In the moral and providential government of man, He proceeds on the principle of law, righteousness, judgment (Deut. xxxii. 4). Thus the New Testament points out to believers that their bodies, being delivered from sin, are made "the instruments of righteousness." The Judgment Day is "a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The awful death of the Son of God on Calvary has its mystery explained by reference to God's righteousness (Rom. iii. 24, 25).

III. THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS. His purposes are unchangeable as His nature. They are formed with perfect intelligence of all they involve. They stretch through all time and eternity. They are firm as the everlasting hills. "I am the Lord; I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." The history of the Jewish and the establishment of the Christian Church is an illustration of God's unswerving faithfulness to the purpose He has formed.

IV. THE DIVINE LOVE. His disposition is to show kindness. Both Testaments are full of this. Nature is filled with arrangements for the well-being of His creatures. Remember, it is goodness to a world of sinners. It is goodness that has deepened into pitying love, and has provided forgiving mercy at the extremest cost. What does the Old Testament say? (Ex. xxxiv. 6.) What says the New? (Rom. v. 8; John iii. 16.)

The two parts of Divine revelation agree respecting the Divine nature. We may learn hence—

1. *The value of the written word.* The continuity of Scripture is an important element. The fringes of Deity may be seen by the mere student of nature, but the inner glory can only be known to the student of revelation. Fearful to think of being in the hands of One of whose disposition you are ignorant. Without the Bible you could know nothing satisfactorily nor certainly of God. Prize and study it, that God may grow into your thoughts.

2. *The importance of sympathy with God.* How do you stand affected toward this great and glorious Being? Do you approve of Him, *i.e.*, of His revealed character? Do you love

Him? Is it a pleasant thing to think of and hold communion with Him? Do you thank and trust Him?

3. *The blessedness of an interest in God.* Through sin, He may become the condemning Judge. But His present attitude is that of the redeeming God. His counsel stood through the ages, and it was His pleasure to send His Son in the fulness of time. If you accept Christ, you are reconciled to Him; you have all spiritual blessings and full salvation.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The Seven Sleepers; or, The Uses of Knowledge of the Past.

xlvi. 9, 10. *Remember the former things of old, &c.*

There is a legend of the early Christianity, whose ready acceptance within a few years of its origin is not less remarkable than its wide diffusion through every country from the Ganges to the Thames. In the middle of the fifth century, the resident proprietor of an estate near Ephesus was in want of building-stone. His fields sloped up the side of a mountain, in which he directed his slaves to open a quarry. In obeying his orders they found a spacious cavern, whose mouth was blocked up with masses of rock artificially piled. On removing these, they were startled by a dog suddenly leaping up from the interior. Venturing farther in, to a spot on which the sunshine, no longer excluded, directly fell, they discovered, just turning as from sleep, and dazzled with the light, seven young men, of dress and aspect so strange that the slaves were terrified, and fled. The slumberers, on rising, found themselves ready for a meal; and the cave being open, one of them set out for the city to buy food. On his way through the familiar country (for he was a native of Ephesus) a thousand surprises struck him. . . . . Before his errand is quite forgot, he enters a bread-shop to make his purchase; offers the silver coin of Decius in payment; when the baker, whose astonishment was already manifest enough, can restrain his suspicions no longer, but arrests his customer as the owner of unlawful treasure, and hurries him before the city court. There he tells his tale: that with his Christian companions he had taken refuge in the cave from the horrors of the Decian persecution; had been pursued thither, and built in for a cruel death; had fallen asleep till wakened by the returning sun; and crept back into the town to procure support for life in their retreat. And there too, in reply, he hears a part of the history which he cannot tell: that Decius had been dethroned by death nearly *two* centuries ago, and Paganism by the truth full *one*. It is added, that the young man conducted certain persons to the cave; and that the seven sleepers, having given their parting blessing to those present, sank in the silence of natural death.

For the purpose of experiment, fable is as good as fact. The citizens and the sleepers were awestruck at each other; yet no one had been conscious of anything awful in himself. The sleepers were proofs that the old, dead times were once alive. Would not the men, returning to their homes, be conscious of understanding life anew? Would they not look down upon their children, and up at the portraits of their ancestors, with a perception from which a cloud had cleared away? Would the nearness of God, spoken of by the prophets, appear any more as idle words? No; the revelation of a reality in the past, would produce the feeling of an unreality in the present. Whence would spring an influence like this? The essence of it is simply this: *The Past stood up in the face of the Present, and spake with it: and they found each other out: and each learned, that he beheld the other with true eye, and himself with false.* The lesson is not set beyond our reach. Our ties with other days are not broken. The legendary youths are but the impersonations of

history. The story is a parable of the relation between historical perception and religous faith.

I. The great end of religion is to distinguish in our existence its essential spirit from its casual forms. This its great end is its great difficulty. Experience mixes the two, and arranges nothing according to its worth. The dress that clothes the body, and the body that clothes the soul, appear always together, and tempt us to exaggerate the trivial and depreciate the great. That which a man *has*, and that which he *is*, move about together and become confounded with each other. It is the business of faith to see all things in their intrinsic value. Time is apt to take away a truth for each one that he gives. *Insight* often tarries with the child. It is an abuse of the blessings of experience, that it stupefies us with its benumbing touch. The great use of custom is to teach us what to expect; this is the true school for the active, working will. But for the thoughtful, wondering affections, a higher discipline is needed. Only by baffled anticipation do we learn to revere what is above us. In shaking off the heavy dreams of custom, religion receives the greatest aid from history. Religion strips the costume from the life that *is:* history restores the costume to the life that *was;* and thus may we see where the mere dress ends and the true life begins. The habit of realising the past is essential to that of idealising the present.

II. A more direct influence of knowledge upon faith intensifies it. Time, like space, cannot be appreciated by merely looking into it; we need objects for the one, events for the other. And for the ends of faith, they must be *moral* vicissitudes, the deeply-coloured incidents of *human* life; or the vastness we see we shall not love; we shall traverse the infinite, and never worship. The two states,—that in the picture of history, and that on the map of faith,—recede almost equally from our immediate experience: and the conception of the one is a sensible help to the realisation of the other. And when we invoke this aid to faith, we give it an ally, not, as might seem, accessible to learning only, but singularly open to the resources of ordinary men. Records of human affairs are supplied in the sacred writings, from which we learn the lessons of Providence. There is no grander agent than the Bible in this world. It is a discipline of priceless value; and from the extension of it, according to opportunity, whosoever is vigilant to keep a living faith will draw ever-fresh stores; and that He may better dwell in heart with Him "who declareth the end from the beginning," "will remember the former things of old."—*James Martineau; Endeavours*, pp. 475–486.

The Scope and the Stability of God's Plan.

xlvi. 10. *My counsel shall stand.*

I. *God has a purpose or plan in regard to human affairs* (H. E. I. 4015–4023; P. D. 2894). If He had not, He could not predict future events, since a contingent event cannot be foreknown and predicted; that is, it cannot be foretold that an event shall certainly occur in one way, when, by the very supposition of its being contingent, it may happen either that way, or some other way, or not at all.

II. *God's plan will not be frustrated.* He has power enough to secure the execution of His designs, and He will exert that power in order that all His plans may be accomplished.

III. *These facts should fill His people with great joy.* For, 1, if there were no Divine plan in relation to human things, the mind could find no rest—everything would have the appearance of chaos, and the mind must be filled with doubts and distractions. But our anxieties vanish in regard to the apparent irregularities and disorders of the universe, when

we feel that all things are under the direction of an Infinite mind, and will be made to further His great designs (H. E. I. 4024–4030; P. D. 2906).

2. If His plans were not accomplished, there would be occasion of equal doubt and dismay. If there was any power that could defeat the purposes of God; if there were any stubbornness of matter, or any inflexible perverseness in the nature of mind; if there were any unexpected and unforeseen extraneous causes that could interpose to thwart His plans, then the mind must be full of agitation and distress. But the moment that it can fasten on the conviction that God has formed a plan that embraces all things, and that all things which occur will in some way be made tributary to that plan, the mind can be calm in resignation to His holy will (P. D. 2898).—*Albert Barnes, D.D.*

I. THE DIVINE COUNSELS.

It is impossible for us to receive, as we do from the word of God, authentic information that there are counsels in the Divine mind as to our world, and all that dwell therein, without perceiving how much its revelations rise above the low conceptions of the wisest men of heathen antiquity, and of all who in our own day prefer their darkness and doubt to the light and certainty of heavenly truth. For—

1. We know that God, who made all things, does concern Himself with our world; that He has not left it to itself, as they thought necessary for His honour; that His regards are not confined to what men call great; that even individuals are noticed by Him (Ps. xxxiii. 13–15, 18, 19, &c.)

2. This interposition is one of counsel,—of deliberation and wise purpose. It is not the intervention of a blind power; not of an intelligence which some have fancied to be bound by what they have called a fixed and determinate plan; but one of counsel; that which possesses infinite resources, &c. Of this, all nature is a standing indication, but still more clearly and impressively, the divine government.

3. God's counsels are supreme and uncontrollable. This it is which gives to good men so entire and joyful a confidence (Prov. xxi. 30). There is a frequent contest of counsel between His creature and God. But they are weak, because they are bounded as to extent, and time, and power.

II. THE STABILITY OF THE DIVINE COUNSELS. Illustrated by—

1. Ancient instances of the fulfilment of delayed purposes—Abraham, the promise of Canaan to his seed, expiration of Judah's captivity, Daniel, the first promise of the seed of the woman.

2. The steadfastness of His holy law—the same in all ages and dispensations.

3. The constant connection of painful fear and misery with sin.

4. The established order of human salvation—as of old, so now. And God will never change it.

5. The uniform experience of good men. Take the effects of prayer—as of old, so now.

CONCLUSION.—What encouragement we thus have to trust God, not only for ourselves, but also as to His Church and the world! (Ps. xxxiii. 11). *R. Watson: Works*, vol. iii. pp. 298–305.

THE PLEASURE OF GOD.

xlvi. 10. *And I will do all My pleasure.*

To most men this assertion is exceedingly distasteful. It shows that God has His purposes, and that they will all be accomplished. Men are willing that God should reign in heaven, but they are infinitely unwilling that He should do His pleasure with *them*. The fierce cry that comes up from the rebel heart is, "Let me manage my own concerns—let not this God have rule over me!" Notwithstanding this opposition of men, God

still reigns. And He will rule in all ages and in all worlds. He will do all His pleasure. This sentiment is proved—

I. **By the testimony of Scripture** (Eccles. viii. 3; Dan. iv. 35; Isa. xiv. 24, &c.) Surely, if there is a doctrine in the Bible, prominent as the sun in the heavens, it is God's sovereignty as a ruler.

II. **By the grand characteristics of God.** He is the only self-existent being in the universe. He is everywhere present. Not only can He plan in accordance with infinite wisdom, mercy, and justice, but He has omnipotent power to execute these purposes. He knew from eternity what would come to pass. In reference to the future there is neither ignorance nor doubt. We must either deny His foreknowledge, or admit that His plans are fixed, and that He "will do," &c. Not that He taketh pleasure in the sins of men—His soul abhorreth them. He made man free to choose. He knew that he would choose evil as well as good; and, for reasons satisfactory to His own mind, He determined to allow it (H. E. I. 2275–2282).

III. **By the history of God's universe.**

1. The history of the fallen angels shows it. When they sinned, God banished them from heaven. This was the just punishment of rebellion. It was the act of a sovereign; for when man rebelled against the same God, and the same punishment was threatened, a voice was heard in heaven, "I have found a ransom."

2. The history of nations shows it. Those nations most prospered, most arrogant, and most likely to trample down the weak, have toppled over. They have become a wonder and a warning to the nations of the earth, while God has strengthened the weak and established the feeble. How prominent has been the intervention of God in the birth, infancy, and growth of our own nation! He made us and kept us a Christian nation.

3. The history of each man proves it. How many things in that history are beyond man's control!—his birth, &c. All these different persons have within them a consciousness of right and wrong. They are free to learn and to choose. If they do wickedly, they will be punished in accordance with the light which they may have. And yet, how stupendous is the difference! And God has allowed it. Let not man complain of God's sovereignty, but rather praise Him, that He has made you to differ from those who have been given up to poverty, superstition, degradation, and crime.

(1.) The plans of men depend for success upon the pleasure of God. No man can control events that are future; for these results may depend upon a thousand incidents that can neither be seen nor avoided. Man may possess the most consummate wisdom, &c., and yet he may fail. Like Pharaoh, Absalom, and Haman, evil men everywhere are doomed to disappointment.

(2.) The conversion of men depends upon the pleasure of God. He has provided salvation for all; has given to all the power of securing it; desires that all should have it; and yet He allows some to reject it, while He induces others freely and earnestly to seek it. Every Christian must exclaim with the apostle, "By the grace," &c. Not that God converts man by almighty power, without the use of means; or that He moves minds and worlds by the same force. Neither did He make some on purpose to be destroyed. (α)

(3.) The pleasure of God will be accomplished in the death of His creatures. How strangely and unexpectedly do men die! But the time and the way are settled by the pleasure of God.

CONCLUSION.—Do you object to the will of God? You cannot prevent it, and why resist it? Is it not His pleasure to do you good? Resistance is futile and fiendish. Yield.—*W. Newell, D.D.: The American National Preacher*, vol. vii. pp. 135–142.

(α) The utmost wisdom is necessary in the statement of this part of this subject. Inexperienced preachers should be silent concern-

ing it. Whoever refers to it in the pulpit should have clearly in his own mind, and make clear to others, the truths in H. E. I., 1776–1797, 2276–2284.—*R. A. B.*

The dominant facts in this chapter are these—that God had determined to deliver His ancient people from their bondage in Babylon, and that He was strong enough to carry out this purpose. To us even the mention of His strength seems unnecessary; but those to whom the deliverance was promised needed to be assured of the power of Jehovah to carry out His purpose. Humanly speaking, their deliverance seemed impossible. How would a similar promise seem now to the few Poles included in the German empire? God always meets the needs of His people, and therefore the whole chapter is so constructed as to produce faith in its climax: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure;" and then there is added a symbolical explanation of the manner in which the Divine purpose would be accomplished (ver. 11).

History tells us that these Divine promises were literally fulfilled. Cyrus, carrying out his own plans, unconsciously accomplished the plan of God with regard to Israel. Remembering what God is, this does not surprise us. Read *historically*, this declaration gives us no trouble whatever, but pleases us; but if we enlarge its reference, and read it *prophetically*, it causes us much perplexity. Two things tend to perplex us—1. God has promised to accomplish great things in the future for this human race of ours (ch. ii. 4, xi. 9, &c.) 2. In the condition of the human race now, there are many things which we find it difficult to believe can be in accordance with God's pleasure. *E.g.*, in the Ten Commandments He has shown that certain things are pleasing and other things displeasing to Him; but in the conduct of men His pleasure in regard to all these things is set at nought. In the New Testament we are told that it is not His will that any should perish, but that all should come to knowledge of the truth; but the majority of the human race live and die ignorant of the salvation which His Son purchased for them at so great a cost. Remembering these things, there springs up in our minds a difficulty which shapes itself thus: *If God could not order things according to His pleasure now, what guarantee have we that He will be able to order things according to His pleasure hereafter?* A great assumption here!

Another consideration seems at first somewhat to relieve the difficulty, *viz.*, that nothing could exist were it not God's pleasure that it should exist, for nothing could exist without His permission. But afterwards it appears to increase the difficulty, for what awful things He permits!

Along this line we do not find that which dispels the mystery; no morning-sun dispersal of the mists that have lain all night along the valley. But we do find that which calms and strengthens us even when the mystery is full in our view. For the mystery has been *permitted*. By God, who is more than infinite in wisdom and irresistible in power; He is also absolute in righteousness and perfect in love. This, through faith, we are sure of. Therefore we are sure of another thing—that the pleasure which gave the permission that puzzles us was wise, righteous, merciful. Our faith goes beyond the old declaration concerning the mystery of evil, that it is a necessary result of the choice God made in the alternative that lay before Him—that of being content with the creation of a material universe, or of adding to it a moral universe, with all its tremendous evil possibilities. He was pleased to choose the latter, we believe also, because He foresaw that the blessings ultimately thus secured would infinitely transcend the evils that might temporarily result from it. Therefore it was a good pleasure.

In this faith we are confirmed by the clear teaching of His Word that it is His custom to regard the results

of a process or of an act more than the process or result itself. This is clearly brought out in what we are told—1. *As to the purpose of His dealings with His children.* He often subjects them to purposes involving great pain, but the result is more than a compensation for all the pain (Heb. xii. 10). 2. *As to His dealings with His Son.* "It *pleased* the Lord to bruise Him." What an amazing declaration! What woe was involved in the "bruising!" It pleased Him, because He did not look only at the hours during which Jesus hung upon the cross.—In like manner, He was pleased to make the choice out of which woes so terrible have sprung, because He looked at the ultimate result, and saw that it would justify the choice. It will do more than that!

At length, moreover, it will be seen that His pleasure was good, not only as it concerned the great family to which we belong, but also as it concerned each individual in that family. There is yet to be such disclosures concerning God's *complete* dealings with such cases as are referred to in the preceding outline, as will show us that God's providence is not like Turner's paintings—pleasant when looked at only in the mass.

We are sure, then, that the pleasure of the Lord is always a *good* pleasure; and 2, that it will be found to be a *victorious* pleasure. It will be found that it is not in vain that in Him omnipotence is allied to wisdom, righteousness, and love. This will be seen, 1, in regard to the redemptive work now in progress in each of His children (Jude 24). 2. In regard to the redemptive work now being carried on in the world by Christ (chap. liii. 6, 7). The results will be a glorious fulfilment of a preceding prophecy (chap. xlv. 23–25).

Out of all this there should be practical outcomes. 1. As Christian men we should be valiant in our personal struggle against temptation (Rom. viii. 37). 2. As Christian workers we should be always diligent and hopeful, knowing that however hard our work may be, the success of that work is certain (1 Cor. xv. 58).

A Call to the Unrighteous.

(*Fourth Sunday in Advent.*)

xlvi. 12, 13. *Hearken unto Me, ye stout-hearted, &c.*

Referred at first to local and national circumstances, but addressed to the men of every generation—to ourselves in our own circumstances, rendered more obvious and striking by the near approach of the joyful season of Christmas.

I. God's dealings with mankind have been all of a character which may be called unexpected. No reason can be given why men should be redeemed, rather than fallen angels, save that it so pleased Him who "worketh all things," &c. Suppose that God had left the world to itself for many ages; suppose Him breaking the silence of centuries, of what nature would the world expect the summons to be if roused in the midst of its profligacy by the call, "Hearken," &c.? Would it not be a message of wrath, &c.? It never could have been expected, that after such a summons would follow such words as are found in the text.

II. Having summoned the stout-hearted to hearken, the words that follow are specially adapted to their case—contain the motives which are most likely to bring them to contrition and repentance. The nearness of salvation is made an argument with the ungodly why they should turn from evil courses, just as preached by the Baptist—"Repent ye, *for*," &c. The argument may not seem at first to be one of extraordinary force, but there is an energy and a persuasiveness in the approach of a Redeemer which may vainly be looked for in the approach of any other persons, or any other event. Apply this argument.

God goes on to speak with more distinctness of His purposes of mercy: "And I will place," &c. Refers originally to what Christ would accomplish at His first appearing in Judea, and also what He would effect at His second advent. But if we confine our thoughts to what has been already effected, we have sufficient material from which to prove the accomplishment of the text. "Righteousness" is the salvation which God promises to be at hand. This is the most faithful description of the deliverance provided through the mediation of Christ, for that deliverance to righteousness which God provided for His own honour whilst providing for our rescue (Rom. ix. 30, &c.) And not only is salvation the righteousness of all, because it provides that God shall be just while the justifier; it is emphatically "God's righteousness," inasmuch as it communicates a righteousness to man which by his own strivings he could not have attained. It does this in two ways—by imputing Christ's righteousness, and by working righteousness in us by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

And this salvation God placed in Zion, for it was only by the going up of the Mediator as a victim to the altar that the curse of the law was exhausted and the honour of the Divine attributes secured. Ages have no power to weaken or remove it. Still is virtue going out from Zion mighty as when the first Atonement was made. But we look for a yet nobler and ampler accomplishment of the prophecy (Isa. xxv. 6–8, lxiii. 1).

"For Israel my glory." Wonderful words! That fallen man should be His glory is an inexplicable mystery apart from Redemption. A redeemed creature is emphatically the glory of God. —*H. Melvill, B.A.: Sermons*, 1853, pp. 562–568.

I. A CALL OF GOD TO THE LISTLESS AND IMPENITENT. "Hearken unto Me ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness."

1 *This call may be said to apply to three classes*—(1.) *To the spiritually deaf;* (2.) *To the spiritually obdurate;* (3.) *To the spiritually destitute*—"Far from righteousness."

2. *This call is entitled to our immediate and most earnest attention.* (1.) *Because it concerns our eternal destiny;* (2.) *Because it is God's call.*

II. CONNECTED WITH THIS CALL IS THE GRACIOUS PROVISION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SALVATION. "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry." Of this salvation, thus provided and so easily available, we remark that—

1. *It is Divine in its origin and nature.* "*I* bring;" "*my* salvation."

2. *It is prompt in its announcement and delivery.* The text signifies anything but *delay*, anything but cold and indifferent *pauses.* God makes haste to be gracious. He observes *due time*, and sent His Son in the *fulness of time.* He is *slow* to anger, but plenteous in mercy. As the prodigal's father ran to meet him, so does God to save man.

3. *It is mercifully adapted to the sinner's condition.* (1.) *He deserves threatening, but obtained instead mercy's rich promise.* God might justly have followed the call by threatening; but rather than this, there is a beautiful transition from the severe to the tender, from the prelude of thunder to the sweet and gentle music of love. It is a beautiful gradation from law to grace. (2.) *He deserves the loss of redemptive privileges, but is offered a near salvation.* (3.) *He deserves present punishment, but is offered a timely pardon.*

III. GOD CONSTITUTES HIS CHURCH THE TREASURY OF THIS ACCESSIBLE SALVATION. "I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory." Here we see—

1. *That the church is the world's house of mercy.*

2. *That the church is entrusted with the most solemn responsibilities.*

3. *That the church is God's glory and object of honour.* "For Israel my glory."—*Thomas Colclough in the "Lay Preacher,"* vol. iii. p. 123.

I. THE DEPLORABLE CONDITION OF UNCONVERTED SINNERS.

1. "Stout-hearted"—stubborn, obdurate, hard. In Ezek. xi. 19 we have a striking and instructive figure describing the condition of unconverted sinners: "The stony heart"—as hard, as cold, as barren, and as dead as a stone!

2. "Far from righteousness"—rightness in heart, in habit, and in life. Morally wrong. Alienated from God. All are naturally wrong (Rom. iii. 10). Yet some talk of moral excellence in fallen creatures, &c. The Bible acknowledges no real excellence but what arises from a work of grace upon the soul. Sin has defaced the moral excellences of man (Jer. xvii. 9; Gen. vi. 5; Rom. viii. 7). "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"—fallen, corrupt, subject to the law of the Fall. "Ye must be born again."

II. THE WONDERFUL MERCY OF GOD. Has provided a method of deliverance from this deplorable condition. "I bring near my righteousness," &c. This deliverance God brings near (Rom. x. 6–9). Your wrongness may be brought to a final end. The gospel is the grand provision for the restoration of righteousness in fallen and sinful men (2 Cor. v. 21, &c.) Though by nature "far off," you may be brought "nigh by the blood of Christ."

III. THE IMPERATIVE DUTY TO WHICH SINNERS ARE SUMMONED. "Hearken unto Me." When God speaks, it behoves us to listen (Heb. ii. 2, 3). Hearken to His voice—immediately, earnestly, practically, constantly. "Hear, and your soul shall live."—*Alfred Tucker.*

A DREADFUL MEETING.

xlvii. 3. *I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man.*

Little did Babylon think with whom she now had to contend. This was no empty threat. It was carried into full and fearful execution. Thus it has fared with other nations, and will, at last, with every impenitent sinner. There is a time of vengeance, as well as of mercy. Then God will meet His enemies, but *not as a man.*

1. When men are about to meet their enemies, it is generally their policy to keep up the show of peace and friendship as long as they can; and to make their preparations secretly, so that when they strike, the blow may fall without warning—without affording any time for escape. But it is not in this manner that God meets His enemies. He gives them warning upon warning.

2. God does not meet His enemies in vengeance, till He has tried every means to recover and reclaim them. The crime of rebellion is commonly visited, by earthly rulers, with immediate condign punishment.

3. God never meets His enemies in vengeance, without a just and sufficient cause. Men often do.

4. God's anger is infinitely removed from that which burns in the breasts of His fallen creatures. He has no private resentment to gratify, no by-ends to answer. He acts as a moral governor, as guardian of the interests of the universe.

5. When God will meet impenitent sinners, there is no hope of resisting Him.

6. When He does meet His enemies, it is with a fixed determination to crush them. He will not spare.

7. Men sometimes, when they undertake to crush an enemy, leave the work unfinished. But it is not thus that God will deal with His enemies. Wherever His vengeance strikes, the blow will be fatal.

8. After an earthly prince has subdued his rebellious subjects, and laid them under his high displeasure, he may be moved by their entreaties and sufferings to release them from prison, and restore them to favour. But God will never show favour in another world to those who refuse submission to Him in this, and die with arms in their hands. "Behold, *now* is the ac-

cepted time." When God shall have cast the impenitent into hell, the last ray of light will be extinguished for ever.—*Heman Humphrey, D.D.: American National Preacher*, vol. iv. pp. 269–274.

The Boast of Babylon.

xlvii. 7. *I shall be a lady for ever.*

The utterance of proud Babylon is identical with that of the vain and self-confident in all ages (Rev. xviii. 7). The delusion prosperity produces in such men, or nations, is always of this sort. This expression suggests that lengthened prosperity in the case of the ungodly leads to—

I. *False security* (Ps. xlix. 6; Job xxix. 18). The tendency of riches and honour is to blind the heart to the future; and too often to steel it toward God. Who is so unconcerned about death as the miser? Who is so indifferent to the claims of God, as those (like Herod) who live upon the breath of popular applause? (H. E. I. 3997–4014.)

II. *Presumption.* "A lady for ever," *i.e.*, in my own right, "no contingency can arise to deprive me of my title and wealth." The prosperous man is tempted to forget he is as dependent upon God now as he was in the days of his adversity (Prov. xxx. 8, 9).

III. *Boasting.* The vernacular of pride—"a lady," superior to others. Prosperity leads its slaves to imagine they are a higher order of being. In God's sight too!

IV. *Self-satisfaction.* "A lady." "I am that now. None will dispute it. I need aim no higher. I am rich, increased in goods," &c. (Rev. iii. 17). How dreadful the delusion! "Thou art wretched," &c. (Rev. iii. 17).

V. *Abandonment to luxury.* "A lady for ever," *i.e.*, "I mean to be at ease, to enjoy life." Let us beware, if our worldly position be prosperous, lest we live on the *gifts*, rather than on the *Giver*. Let us beware lest we appropriate the talents God has given us to our own ends. That is robbery. If the man who hid his Lord's money was condemned, what shall be the doom of those who use it for self-indulgence?

VI. *Spiritual blindness.* The certain future of man is declared. But the vain and foolish will not consider their latter end! Prosperity dazzles the eye; the future is wilfully disregarded. The cry of the world, though uttered in other dialects and in different words, is the boast of Babylon, "I shall be a lady for ever." The boast is its belief.

Conclusion.—Remember the desolation of self-confident Babylon—*widowhood, childlessness, poverty, famine, shame, disease, insanity, exile, death.* Nor shall the future of those who disobey the Gospel be less dreadful or severe.—*R. A. Griffin: Stems and Twigs*, p. 256.

The Neglect of Warnings.

xlvii. 7. *Thou didst not lay these things to heart, neither didst thou remember the latter end of it.*

God warns before He strikes. He gives tokens and premonitions of His approaching judgments, before He proceeds to the fulfilment of His threatenings (Amos iii. 7; Gen. xviii. 17, &c.) He would have men forewarned that they may be forearmed; that "that day" may not come upon them unawares. He condescends to forewarn His enemies as well as His friends. The men of the old world were warned by the preaching of Noah; the inhabitants of the cities of the plain by Lot; Babylon of her doom and desolation by Isaiah and the other prophets. It was a great enhancement of the guilt of Babylon, and the cause of a great aggravation of her

doom, that these merciful warnings were despised; and woe will be unto us if we follow in the same track, and neglect the warnings that are addressed to us.

I. THE COURSE OF CONDUCT CONDEMNED. "Thou didst not lay these things to heart." Though the desolation of Babylon was distinctly foretold—by Isaiah 160 years before the event; by Jeremiah fifty years; and by Daniel when the event was just at hand—yet she took no heed. Let him that is without sin cast the first stone! This insensibility to the threatened judgments of Heaven is—

1. *Very common.* It is the miserable result of depravity that we delay to the last what we ought to seek first. Though God warns us in every possible way—by His Word, by His providence, by the death of friends, by the calamities that occur around us, by the consequences of sin in the family circles of others—we continue blind and thoughtless. We see this in the young; in the busy, the enterprising, the prosperous; in those who are troubled and tried; in the confirmed and hardened transgressor.

2. *Very sinful.* It arises from guilt, and leads to greater guilt. It cannot be a trivial thing that God should speak to man, and that man should refuse to hear.

3. *Very foolish.* To the Babylonians the fabric of their power seemed so fair and strong that no human power could shake it; and they were much too far gone in presumption to dread the divine indignation. Their arrogance and conceit of their extended dominion and invincible prowess was so great, that it never entered into their mind that there was One above them, or that it was possible for them to fall into such calamities as were here threatened. But Babylon was not the first, and will not be the last, in whom the saying will be made good, that "pride goeth before a fall" (Ps. x. 4–6, and lxxiii. 11–19).

4. *Very dangerous.* Dangerous because it hardens the man in sin, closes the heart to all heavenly influences, and opens it to those that are earthly and carnal: commits the man to the downward road, all his habits, pursuits, and tendencies impelling him in the one direction; does the work of Satan in the soul; darkens the light of reason and conscience; paves the way for greater departures from God, and blocks up the avenues of return (H.E.I. 1446–1456, 4232–4252). Dangerous because it grieves the Holy Spirit, and provokes Him utterly to depart from us. The business of salvation must be done in God's time. Where has He given any man leave to put off repentance for a single day? He who bids you repent at all, bids you repent to-day. Those who put off repentance for another day, have a day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in.

II. THE FEARFUL JUDGMENT DENOUNCED—a type on a large scale of the overthrow of sinners.

1. *The certainty of it.* "Therefore hear now this. . . . these two things shall come to thee." As certainly as she was guilty, careless, and impenitent, so certainly should the wrath of Heaven fall upon her, and fall the more heavily by reason of her hardened impiety and presumption. Impenitent sinner, think of the certainty of your overthrow! It is not more certain that he that believeth shall be saved, than that he that believeth not shall be damned; that the righteous shall go away into life eternal, than that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment.

2. *The suddenness of it.* "Those two things shall come to thee in a moment, in one day." Your ruin may come from the quarter least expected: from the treachery of an accomplice; from your nearest and dearest friend; from an unguarded word from your own lip (ver. 11). Nothing heightens ruin like unexpectedness. The foolish virgins left in the outer darkness; Haman overthrown at the banquet of Esther; Belshazzar feasting with his nobles when his doom was written upon the wall; the Philistines triumphing when Samson pulled down the pillars of the temple; the man without the wedding

garment who had actually taken his place at the wedding feast; Jonah had made good all his plans and preliminary movements, and was asleep when the storm came on (Prov. xxix. 1).

3. *The retributory character of it.* An exact proportionment of the punishment to the crime. No undue severity shown even to Babylon (ver. 6; Jas. ii. 13; Rev. xviii. 5, 6). Nor even to the chief of sinners. Always a just recompense of reward.

4. *The utter hopelessness of those on whom it comes* (ver. 12–15).

CONCLUSION.—The blessedness of those who have given wise heed to God's merciful warnings. They have the best friend (ver. 4). The surest promises (ch. xlviii. 15, 17). A heavenly home.—*Samuel Thodey.*

PRACTICAL ATHEISM AND GENUINE PIETY.

xlvii. 10. *Thou hast said, None seeth me.*

Gen. xvi. 13. *And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me.*

Here is—

I. PRACTICAL ATHEISM. "Thou hast said, None seeth me," *i.e.*, God is indifferent to our conduct. This is the practical denial of Divine Omniscience (Ps. x. 11, xciv. 7). That the self-existent and eternal God should not see is a palpable absurdity (Ps. xciv. 8–10). This haughty language suggests *a sad tendency in human nature.*

"This practical atheism is very prevalent and pernicious at the present time. Immense numbers utter the 'Apostles' Creed' regularly, who exclude God from almost every province of their life. In the formation of their plans, in the management of their business, in their relations to society, &c., 'God is not in all their thoughts.'" They act as if God did not see them. They are no more restrained in their conduct than they would be if this was their deliberate conviction, or than if they had settled it in their minds that God is regardless of human actions. "The *causes* of this tendency are not inherent in human nature, but are (1.) Dislike of God. (2.) Dread of God."

II. GENUINE PIETY. "Thou God seest me." Heb.: "Thou (art a) God of seeing—of vision." God sees as well as hears (Jacobus). This pious utterance *suggests a solemn fact in human history*—that God sees us. 1. The very nature of God implies this. The supposition that there is anything that God does not see involves a contradiction.

2. The Bible teaches this (Job xxxiv. 21, 22; Ps. cxxxix. 1–4, 11, 12, 15, 16; Jer. xxiii. 24; Amos ix. 2, 3; Acts xvii. 27, 28; Heb. iv. 13). The case of Hagar is a remarkable illustration—a sudden and surprising conviction that God sees and knows all (Gen. xvi. 13, 14).

III. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS WHICH THIS SUBJECT CONVEYS.

Such as these:—

1. *It warns the wicked.* Secret as their sins may seem, they are all discerned and known by Him who is their Judge (Job xxxiv. 21, 22).

2. *It should restrain us from evil.* "The eye of a child will effectually check the execution of some evil purposes; more the eye of man or woman; yet more the eye of a holy man or woman. But God's eye sees all things everywhere. And He is perfectly holy!"

3. *It should incite us to a beautiful and useful life*—beautiful in its spirit, and useful in its moral influence. "The athletes of Greece and Rome were inspired to run or wrestle by the knowledge of the fact that they were surrounded by a vast assembly of spectators (Heb. xii. 1). Oh! if we but realised God's presence, our life would become brave and beautiful and holy. God is not only present everywhere, but everywhere present to inspire, and aid, and bless."

4. *It should comfort and strengthen the people of God* amid the duties and con-

flicts and trials of life. There is One who knows all things that relate to them, and who can with the utmost ease adapt all circumstances and events to their good. They are always under their great Master's eye.—*Alfred Tucker.*

Omniscience Ignored.

xlvii. 10. *Thou hast said, None seeth me.*

I. *This notion has great influence upon the conduct of man.* Such a notion is convenient. Offenders against man retire to the dark when they mean to perpetrate their evil deeds. Concealment is the helpmeet of wrong. Because they sometimes, perhaps often, escape the most watchful human eyes, they fancy it possible to escape the eye of God. They would have no interest whatever in reaching this conclusion, if they never wished to do anything wrong. The sinner persuades himself of two or three things: he has gained his end; he has escaped observation; he has avoided the punishment. It is not necessary that all this be formulated. It is sufficient if the mind accustoms itself to question whether God sees. The sinner will take advantage of a doubt.

II. *This notion is utterly untruthful and delusive.* Whether our sinful deeds are seen by man or not, there is One to whom they are open as the day. If there is a God at all, this must be so. If you persuade yourself that God does not see, you persuade yourself that God is not. That part of the universe which God does not know, has no God. He who does not know everything is limited; therefore he is not God. But you cannot see Him. When you cannot see a man, you infer that he is not present. So with God. Thus you require that which would argue Him nothing more than a man after all. The spirituality of the Divine nature makes it possible for Him to be everywhere and see everything.

III. *God has often, in human experiences, shown the delusiveness of this notion, and the time is fixed for the complete demonstration of its delusiveness.* 1. Character is often seen through by man. 2. Retribution often follows man's deeds in the present world. Joseph's brethren, Achan, and Saul. 3. The future state will show that God saw. At the judgment day the books will be opened. What is written there will prove that sin was seen. Hell will be an everlasting proof.

Conclusion.—Sinner, God sees you; has seen you all along. Be warned, Christian! 1. Be encouraged and comforted by the thought that God sees. He sees the good and their goodness. Be more constantly influenced by this thought. (1.) Let it restrain from sin. (2.) Let it stimulate to holy obedience and earnest work (H. E. I. 2257–2267).—*J. R., in the Pulpit Analyst.*

It would probably be an aid to excellence of life, if we would suppose some distinguished person always looking upon us. We are often deterred from evil by fear of the disapproval of some one whose good opinion we value. The thought of the Divine observation exerts an important influence on the conduct of such as believe it. It is unspeakably pleasant to those who regard Him as an ever-present friend, with whom they are in full sympathy, whom they desire to please. To those who do not regard Him as their friend, who are not in sympathy with Him, and who pursue a course of conduct contrary to His nature, it is repugnant. Hence men who desire to live in sin persuade themselves that He does not see their actions. This persuasion of sinners is convenient to them, but it is delusive and mischievous.

I. It is a convenient persuasion.

1. *It is adopted because of its convenience.* It is on that account open to suspicion. The mind, in taking it, was not in the most favourable condition for the ascertainment of truth. Why is it convenient to say God does not see? Because there is a desire to do what He does not approve. When the fraudulent merchant remains alone in his office, manipulating his accounts so as to defraud his creditors; when the impure retire behind the curtains of the night and of the chamber; when the burglar disguises himself, and in darkness plies his nefarious occupation; when the murderer watches for his victim in the depths of the forest, it is for the same reason.

2. *It rests on an insecure negation.* In its most pronounced form, it amounts to a denial of the Divine existence. We will not say that *all* Atheists are persons whose immoral lives have rendered it impossible to retain comfort along with belief in God (H. E. I. 369); but it is certain that *a large proportion* of the Atheism around us has no better ground than this. A man in conflict with God's character takes refuge in the denial of His existence. Or, while not formally denying it, he persuades himself that the Divine Being is too great to concern Himself with the small affairs and acts of mortals. Or, perhaps more frequently in the strong confidence that no *human* eye is upon him, the sinner crowds out of his mind the fact that the *Divine* Eye is upon him. He does not distinctly deny it, but he practically ignores it; and, hurried on by the strength of passion, forgets that he should have taken more than his fellow-men into consideration. Hence—

3. *It becomes a welcome encouragement to sin.* The heart is inclined to sin, and only restrained by the fear of punishment. Then if the fear of punishment is removed by the persuasion that there is no witness, the barrier is thrown down, the sinful inclination will be indulged. Gehazi never thought that the watchful eye of God had been upon his proceedings. Beware upon what grounds you release yourself from the restraint imposed by the recognition of God's personal presence everywhere.

II. IT IS A DELUSIVE PERSUASION. The sinner says none sees him. But there are moments when he suspects that he may have deceived himself. Conscience will sometimes whisper the question, "What if God, after all, has been observant of the sin?"

How frequently do transgressors find that they have not been so secluded from *man* as they supposed! Some unclosed crevice through which the deed has been seen. Subtle links of evidence are discovered and placed together so as to make a chain by which the most hidden crimes are dragged to light.

And it is unquestionably a delusion that GOD does not see. The sinner forgets the immense difficulties in the way of his convenient persuasion. He forgets that before he is in a position to say there is no God to see, he must know everything in the universe. Because the thing beyond his present knowledge may be this—that there is a God. Or if he supposes that, a God existing, He does not concern Himself with men, he forgets that the idea of a personal God carries with it this notion of His intimate acquaintance with everything about His creatures. —(H. E. I. 4015.)

What does He say about Himself in this respect? Does not the idea that He sees man's acts run through His Word? (Psa. xciv. 9, cxxxix. 1–12). In other words, God's acquaintance with our life and ways comprehends everything, however minute. Men practise a delusion on themselves when they imagine He does not see them.

III. IT IS A MISCHIEVOUS PERSUASION. Inasmuch as human nature is so largely influenced by the fact that there are witnesses of our conduct, it is a mischievous withdrawment of influence for good when the witness whose approbation is the most impor

tant is supposed to be withdrawn. From those who are only deterred from evil by the consciousness of being seen or the fear of punishment, it is like the withdrawment of the master's eye from the unfaithful servant. It opens the way to the commission and multiplication of sin. It increases the danger and the measure of punishment. Sin is the material out of which punishment is made. It sometimes overtakes sinners in the present world. For the most part it is deferred to the future state, perhaps to afford time and opportunity for the sinner's repentance. It only falls in its full weight when the sinner has finally rejected the overtures of God's grace. However secretly sin may have been committed, the judgment-day will reveal it (Matt. xxv.; H. E. I. 3055). The conduct we are building up in our daily life is preparing the sentence of the Judge. Beware of the deceitfulness of sin. It fascinates with its eye, but it destroys with its sting. It will find out the sinner, though he retire to the deepest darkness or the remotest corner of the earth.

Cherish the belief in God's constant presence and inspection. The very fact of unwillingness to be seen by Him shows a consciousness of something that dare not meet His eye. But is it not better to abandon that something, whatever it is, than delude ourselves with the persuasion that God does not see? Drusus would have all the city see his manner of life. Oh that we all so lived that the thought of God's constant supervision could be a joy! The eye of His infinite holiness is upon us. With infinite approbation He sees the struggle against evil. With sorrowful condemnation He sees the sin. Fear to sin. Cultivate the disposition to please God. Suppress the inclination to the thing that would wish to elude His eye (H. E. I. 2257–2261). — *J. Rawlinson.*

Pernicious Knowledge.

(*Sunday School Sermon.*)

xlvii. 10. *Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee.*

Heavy are the charges laid against the great and guilty city of Babylon. Not only had she dealt unmercifully with God's people (ver. 6), but her profligacy, luxury, pride, effeminacy, and wickedness were excessive (vers. 7, 8, 10). she was withal superstitious and idolatrous in the highest degree (vers. 9, 12, 13). What was the fruitful cause of all these abominations? Was it brutal ignorance, or barbarous uncultivation? No: it was just the reverse. Alas for the philosophers and wise men of this world! all the abominations of Babylon are here traced to human wisdom and science: "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee." A proposition which runs counter to many prevalent opinions and prejudices. Let us, then,

I. Examine and vindicate this declaration.

1. *Of what wisdom and knowledge does Isaiah thus speak?* It was human wisdom and science in the highest perfection! The same which opposed Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, Paul at Athens: secular learning, the cultivation of the intellect, philosophy in its deepest and most subtle forms; for to this Babylon even the sages of Greece came as learners! in a word, it was all that the mind of man could attain without revelation.

2. *Against this wisdom and knowledge the Scriptures bring the charge of perverting men's minds in morals and religion.* This is expressly done in this chapter. Ezekiel affirms the same of the great mercantile city of Tyre (Ezek. xxviii. 3–6). St. Paul came more into contact with this worldly wisdom than any of the Apostles, and he was perhaps more capable of appreciating its true character; and he uniformly condemns it (1 Cor. i. 21–27, iii. 18–20; Rom. i. 22, 23)

3. *That this testimony is not overcharged, all history proclaims.* Superstitions, vices, and infidelity have prevailed in those countries where, and exactly at those times when, carnal wisdom has been most highly cultivated. Egypt was the birthplace and cradle of science; and in no country was idolatry more degrading. The scriptural account of the state of Babylon, where science was nurtured and developed, is corroborated by profane history. Its abominable vices could not be here detailed. The greatest sages of Greece are all chargeable with either practising or inculcating the grossest vices. The moral atrocities of the French Revolution, when Reason was deified in the person of an infamous woman, prove that time cannot alter the deteriorating tendency of unassisted human intellect.

4. *All this is accounted for by the Scripture account of the fall of man.* If that account is correct, no other results can follow (Job xiv. 4). Equally with his other powers, the intellect of man was impaired by the fall of Adam, and became the ally of his polluted heart. The first example of its exercise was an instance of false reasoning against God Himself (Gen. iii. 12). See also Gen. vi. 5, viii. 21; Eph. iv. 18. Hence it follows that intellectual blindness is upon the heart of man; all his rational faculties are incapable of just conclusions on any religious subject, except they be assisted by a supernatural power.

5. *Hence it inevitably follows that the cultivation of the intellectual parts of man can of itself have no tendency towards moral or spiritual good.* If all the mental powers of man be in themselves depraved, the increase of his intelligence can only increase his faculty of evil; so that secular education, apart from religious and moral control, must be in itself a curse and not a blessing. It may create a generation of philosophic sceptics and apologists for vice, or even praters about virtue; but a moral and religious people it never has produced, and never can. Let us therefore consider—

II. THE REMEDY WHICH GOD HATH PROVIDED AGAINST ALL THESE INTELLECTUAL EVILS.

Because we declare the moral powerlessness of merely human knowledge, our enemies affirm that we are the patrons of ignorance and bigotry, wish the mind to stagnate, and desire to repress scientific inquiries. Groundless charges. We fear not the progress of philosophy, if she be guided by religion; nor the wisdom of man, if it be in subordination to the wisdom of God. *This* is the remedy of the intellectual and moral evils of our time.

1. *The supreme need of this generation is instruction in the wisdom and knowledge which are of God, above those which are of men* (see vol. i. pp. 373–378).

2. *This wisdom and knowledge must be imparted to mankind by those means which God has appointed.* The Bible. The preaching of the Gospel. *The instruction of children in Divine truth* (H. E. I. 793, 794, 803–806, 1751, 1771).

CONCLUDING REMARKS.—1. Let us beware of the pride of mental cultivation. 2. Let all our knowledge, and all our mental powers, be consecrated to the service of God. 3. Let the poor and simple rejoice that moral and spiritual excellence are attainable by them. — *F. Close, A. M.: Fifty-Two Sketches of Sermons*, pp. 177–183.

THE SECURITY OF PROUD SINNERS.

xlvii. 10, 11. *For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness, &c.*

In the Babylonians we have types of proud sinners in every age—both in regard to their fancied security and the end of it.

I. THEIR FANCIED SECURITY. "I shall be a lady for ever. I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children" (vers. 7, 8). The calamities that might come upon other men

would not touch them! They were vainly confident of the perpetuity of their pomps and pleasures. Observe—

1. *The cause of their fancied security.* They thought themselves safe and out of danger, not because they were ignorant of the uncertainty of all earthly enjoyments, and the inevitable fate that attends states and kingdoms as well as particular persons, but because they did not lay this to heart (ver. 7), did not apply it to themselves, nor give it a due consideration. They lulled themselves asleep in ease and pleasure (chap. lvi. 12). They did not remember the latter end (ver. 7) of their *prosperity*, that it is a fading flower, and will wither; of their *iniquity*, that it will be bitterness; and that the day will come when their injustice and oppression must be reckoned for and punished. To-day ungodly men are easy in their sinful ways, because they never think of death, and judgment, and their future state.

2. *The ground of their fancied security.* (1.) Their power and wealth, which they had gotten by fraud and oppression, were their confidence (ver. 10). Like Doeg (Ps. lii. 7). Many have so debauched their own consciences, and are got to such a daring pitch of wickedness, that they stick at nothing; and this they trust to, to carry them through those difficulties which embarrass men who make conscience of what they say and do. (2.) Their policy and craft, which they called their *wisdom*, were their confidence. They thought they could out-wit all mankind, and therefore might set their enemies at defiance; but their wisdom and knowledge perverted them—made them forget themselves and the preparation necessary to be made for hereafter.

3. *The foolish boastings into which their fancied security betrayed them.* (1.) "I shall be a lady for ever" (ver. 7). Babylon looked upon the patent of her honour to be not merely during the pleasure of the sovereign Lord, the fountain of honour, or during her own good behaviour, but to be perpetual (cf. Rev. xviii. 7). Those great ones mistake themselves who think they shall be exalted for ever; death will shortly lay them and their honour in the dust. Saints shall be saints for ever, but those who are merely this world's great ones will be what they are only for a little while (H.E.I. 1537). (2.) "I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children" (ver. 8), *i.e.*, she would never lack a monarch to espouse and protect her, nor would there be any diminution in the numbers of her people. Those that are in the height of prosperity are apt to fancy themselves out of the reach of adverse fate (Ps. x. 4–6). (3.) "None seeth me" (ver. 10), *i.e.*, "No one sees me when I do amiss, and therefore there will be none to call me to an account." It is common for sinners to trust to their wicked arts and designs to stand them in stead, because they think they have carried them on so plausibly that none can discern the wickedness and deceit of them. How foolish are they in their wickedness! (Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12.)

II. ITS END. It will be ruin (ver. 11).

1. *It will be a complete ruin*—the ruin of all their comforts and confidences. "These two things shall come upon thee (the very two things thou didst set at defiance), loss of children and widowhood. Both thy princes and thy people shall be cut off, so that thou shalt be no more a government, no more a nation." Note, God often brings upon secure sinners those very mischiefs which they thought themselves least in danger of; "they shall come upon thee in their perfection, with all their aggravating circumstances, and without anything to allay or mitigate them." What a contrast between the afflictions of the godly and of the godless!

2. *It will be a sudden and surprising ruin.* The evil shall come in one day, nay in a moment (ver. 9), which will make it much the more terrible, especially to those who were so very secure. "Evil shall come upon thee, and thou shalt have neither time nor way to provide against it, or to prepare for it; for 'thou shalt not know from whence it rises,' and therefore shalt not know

where to stand upon thy guard." "Thou shalt not know the morning thereof;" so the Hebrew phrase is. We know just when and where the day will break and the sun rise, but we know not what the day, when it is come, will bring forth, nor when or where trouble will arise; perhaps the storm may come from that point of the compass which we little thought of. Babylon pretended to great wisdom and knowledge (ver. 10), but with all her wisdom cannot foresee, nor with all her wisdom prevent, the ruin threatened (ver. 11). Fair warning of this desolation was indeed given them by the prophets of the Lord; but they slighted that notice, and therefore justly is it so ordered that they should have no other notice of it, but that, partly through their own security, and partly through the swiftness and subtility of the enemy, when it came it should be a perfect surprise to them. Those that slight the warnings of the written Word, let them not expect any other premonition.

3. *It will be an irresistible ruin* (ver. 11). There is no opposing the judgments of God when they come with commission. Babylon herself, with all her wealth, power, and multitude, is not able to put off the mischief that comes. —*Matthew Henry: Commentary, in loco.*

False Securities.

xlvii. 11–15. *Therefore shall evil come upon thee, &c.*

I. *Look at this picture of utter and painful bewilderment.* This is the necessary and inevitable result of sin. 1. We have been warned of it. 2. A way of escape has been made.

II. *Hear the divine challenge addressed to the false powers in which we have trusted,* as money, chance, self-confidence, atheism. 1. They ought to be most useful when most needed. 2. They should show their sufficiency by their fearlessness. See text. (1.) There is to be a great collision. (2.) In that collision only the true can stand.

III. *See the doom of false securities.* 1. Let no man complain of want of opportunity of estimating the value of his moral securities; or, 2. Of having been allowed to live unwarned.

Application.—1. We cannot escape the trial of our securities. 2. If we set ourselves against God, we challenge all the forces of His creation—fire, wind, flood, pestilence, &c.—*J. C. Gray: Biblical Museum, in loco.*

The Portion of the Ungodly. (α)

xlvii. 14. *Behold, they shall be as stubble, &c.*

Part of a terrible description of God's judgment upon Babylon and Chaldea. It is a truth beyond dispute that God's justice is not partial; that the description of the destruction which He awards to one class of sinners is a most fair picture of what He will do with others, for God hath not two or three ways of dealing with men in His justice. The ruin of Chaldea is to us, to-day, a representation and metaphorical description of the destruction which shall surely come upon impenitent sinners when the Lord cometh out of His place to "judge His enemies," &c. At first sight the figures in our text seem contradictory.

I. The first figure. The punishment of the wicked will be, 1. "*easily inflicted.*" "They shall be as stubble." Nothing can be more easy than to kindle stubble when it is fully dry. So shall it be with impenitent sinners. (1.) The power of memory shall become a vehicle of sorrow. (2.) Conscience. (3.) Increased knowledge. Now you know enough to leave you without excuse, but then your knowledge shall increase so as to leave thee without pretence of apology. (4.) Companions.

2. *Most searching and terrible.* The

metaphor of fire is used in Scripture, because it is that which of all things causeth most pain, and is the most searching and trying.

3. *Most inevitable.* "They shall not," &c. There *is* hope now; there shall be no hope then. How can it be avoided? Man has no strength to match the Most High; no wisdom to invent another plan of salvation; no ability to hide from God's presence.

If you profess to be a Christian nominally, you believe this—one of the fundamental truths of revelation.

II. THE SECOND FIGURE. "There shall not be a coal," &c.; by which is meant that there shall be nothing in hell that can give the sinner a moment's comfort. Nothing as the soul lifts its eye to *heaven*, for that is lost. Nothing in *hell* itself, for the more there are, the more wretched. Nothing in *themselves, nor in their thoughts.* Nothing in *God*, for the sting of all the punishment will be —"I deserve it; I brought this on myself." Nothing *in the past*, for that will give agony. Nothing in the soul's *present condition.* Nothing in their *future condition*, for they shall never see the shadow of a hope.

III. "BEHOLD." Turn not away your eyes from this meditation. Children of God, behold it; it will make you grateful; make you love poor sinners. Unconverted sinner, behold it. Better to think of it now than to think of it for ever. If false, reject it; but if real, meditate upon these things; and may God lead you out of self to Christ. "Turn ye," &c.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 444.

(*a*) A minister, living at Wisbech, authenticates the following singular case of conversion through our sermon on "The Portion of the Ungodly," No. 444. The writer says in a recent letter to us, "Seventeen years ago it pleased the Lord to permit me to dream that the end of the world was come, and in my dream I saw the saints rising with the Lord Jesus to glory. I was left, and near me, upon a large quantity of stubble stood an acquaintance who addressed me thus:—'They used to say in the other world that we should be in fire, but it is not so.' In a moment flames burst out, and in my fright I awoke. A few days after my dream my friend and I heard you preach at the Tabernacle. Judge how great was our surprise when you announced for your text, Isaiah xlvii. 14, 'Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.'" In August, 1876, a severe affliction, the dream, and our sermon resulted in our friend's conversion.—*Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, in the Sword and Trowel*, vol. xv. pp. 294, 295.

A SAD CONTRAST.

xlviii. 1, 2. *Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, &c.*

Here is, I. Privilege. II. Form. III. Profession. IV. Yet no religion.—*J. Lyth, D.D.: The Homiletical Treasury, Isaiah*, p. 65.

THE PROBABILITY AND USE OF INSPIRED PREDICTIONS.

xlviii. 3. *I have declared the former things, &c.*

I. Is it quite plain that any being that is distinguished above others must be exalted, either by knowledge or by power, or by both? Hence God is known in this way, and chiefly by knowledge.

II. The uses of inspired predictions. 1. Study the book that contains them. 2. Watch God's providence, and see how it fulfils His word. 3. Learn from hence to admire and adore the omniscience and faithfulness of God. 4. Expect all that God has predicted, both for time and eternity.—*Dr. J. Bennett: Biblical Museum, in loco.*

GOD'S COMMUNICATIONS TO MANKIND.

xlviii. 6–8. *I have showed thee new things, &c.*

I. *The manner of God's communications.* Prophetic, addressed to the ear, and concerning things hidden from human reason. Providential, addressed

to the eye. (In dealing with ver. 7, show—1. Man's tendency to intellectual pride. 2. How this is checked by God's method of revelation.)

II *The manner in which they are received.* With inattention; without understanding; with wilful impenitence—all arising out of natural corruption.—*J. Lyth, D.D.: The Homiletical Treasury, Isaiah*, p 65.

God's Foreknowledge of Man's Sin.

xlviii. 8. *Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not, &c.*

The ancient people of God were most vexatiously stolid; and although the Lord taught them very plainly and repeatedly, line upon line, &c., yet they would not understand His will. Though taught by God-sent prophets, yet the people refused to be instructed. As in a looking-class, let us see ourselves! Let the unconverted man see his own picture! God has spoken quite as pointedly to you as ever He did to the seed of Israel. He has called you by providences, &c. Three times a *yea* is put into our text, as if to show God's wonder at man's obstinacy, and the certainty that such was the state of the heart. More painful still is it to remember, that in a certain degree the same accusation may be laid at the door of believers. Even they have not such a degree of spiritual sensibility as they should have. Alas! we may well bewail ourselves that *we* do not hear the voice of God as we ought. Having thus reminded you of your sin, trusting we may be led to confess it with deep humility, I have now an encouraging truth to tell you, a very simple one, that all this folly, and ignorance, and obstinacy, and rebellion on our part, was foreknown by God; and notwithstanding that foreknowledge, He yet has been pleased to deal with us in a way of mercy.

I. I ADDRESS THIS TRUTH TO THE BELIEVER.

1. *A mournful fact*, "I knew," &c. That word "treacherously" is one which a man would not like to have applied to himself in the common transactions of life; he would feel it to be very galling, and if there were truth in it, very degrading; and yet I question whether it will produce the same effect upon our minds when it is applied to us in relation to unfaithfulness to God. How treacherous we have been to our own vows and promises when we were first converted! This is not all. It is not merely that we have failed in promises which were made in a period of excitement, but we have been treacherous to obligations which were altogether apart from voluntary vows on our part; we have been treacherous to the most blessed relationships which mercy could have instituted. Have you not lived as if you were your own? As soldiers, by cowardice, disobedience, and desertion, we have been treacherous to a very shameful degree. Worst of all is the fact that we have been treacherous to our Lord in a relationship where fidelity constitutes the very essence of bliss, the marriage bond which exists between our soul and Christ.

2. *The Divine statement* of the text, that all this was known. It was no secret that we were transgressors from the womb. As the Lord foreknew the fountain of sin, so He knew all the streams which would gush from it. There are no things unknown to God. We never have surprised the Most High; we never have brought Him to such a position that He could say, "I did not know this." We have never gone into any sin of which it could be said concerning God, that He did not know that it would so be wrought by us.

3. Seeing that this is most certain and sure, *adore the amazing grace of God.* You have dealt very treacherously, and yet you were *redeemed* not with silver and gold, &c., and you have been *adopted* into the Lord's family.

4. This truth is very important to us, because in the light of it *our*

security is clearly manifest. God can never be obstructed by a circumstance in us which can create surprise in His mind, or throw His course out of His reckoning.

5. This truth, also, should tend very much to *enhance our sense of the fulness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus.* The Lord our God has provided for us in Christ for all the necessities that can occur, for He has foreknown all these necessities.

II. I APPLY THIS TRUTH TO THE UNCONVERTED.

You have discovered lately the natural vileness of your heart, &c. You have a deep regret for your long delay in seeking mercy. You are willing to acknowledge that there have been special aggravations in your case. Now, the gospel of Jesus Christ is sent to you in the state in which you now are. All these sins, delays, aggravations, and rebellions of yours, were all foreknown to God; therefore, since He has sent the Gospel to you, be not slow to accept it, since it is not possible that your sins, whatever they may be, can at all militate against the fact that, if you believe and receive the Gospel, you shall be saved. Why invent a scheme by which a rebel might be saved, if He foreknew that on account of sin that rebel never could be pardoned? Do you think God would have gone farther—gone to the vast expense of providing a Saviour, if really the Gospel were null and void? He maketh not an exception. Though a man had daubed himself a thousand times with the blackest filth that ever came from hell, yet, if he believes in Jesus, God must be true to His solemn promise (H.E.L. 2332–2337).—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 779.

THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

xlviii. 9. *For My name's sake, &c.*

It is possible that the design of this verse may be to answer an objection. "If the character of the nation is such," it might be said, "why should God desire to restore them again to their own land?" To this the answer is, it was not on their account—not because they were deserving of His favour, nor was it primarily and mainly in order that they might be happy. It was on His own account—in order to show His covenant faithfulness, His mercy, &c. And this is the reason why He "defers His anger" in relation to any of the children of men. His own glory, and not their happiness, is the main object in view. And this is right. The glory, the honour, and the happiness of God, are of more importance than the welfare of any of His creatures.

1. God acts with reference to His own glory, in order to manifest His own perfections, and to secure His praise.

2. The reason why the wicked are not cut off sooner in their transgressions is, that He may show His forbearance, and secure praise by long-suffering.

3. The reason why the righteous are kept amidst their frequent failures in duty, their unfaithfulness, and their many imperfections, is that God may get glory by showing His covenant fidelity.

4. It is one evidence of piety, and one that is indispensable, that there should be a willingness that God should secure His own glory in His own way, and that there should be a constant desire that *His* praise should be promoted, whatever may befall His creatures.—*A. Barnes, D.D.: Commentary on Isaiah, in loco.*

MERCY'S MASTER MOTIVE.

xlviii. 9–11. "*For My name's sake will I defer Mine anger,*" *&c.*

The people of Israel, in all their generations, were full of evil. The Lord falls back upon Himself, and within Himself finds a reason for His

grace. "For my name's sake," &c. Finding a motive in His own glory which was bound up in the existence of Israel, and would have been compromised by their destruction, He turned unto them in love and kindness; Cyrus wrote the decree of emancipation, the Israelites came back to the land, and once again they sat every man under his own vine and fig-tree, and ate the good of the land. So far we give the historical meaning of the passage. We shall now use the text as an illustration of Divine love in other cases, for from one deed of grace we may learn all. As God dealt with His people Israel after the flesh, in the same manner He dealeth with His people Israel after the spirit; and His mercies towards His saints are to be seen as in a mirror in His wondrous loving-kindness towards the seed of Abraham. I shall take the text to illustrate—

I. THE CONVERSION OF THE SINNER.

1. God finds him so utterly ruined and depraved, that in him there is no argument for mercy, no plea for grace. You have been obstinate in sin; impudent in your dealing with God; your brow has been brass. You have behaved very treacherously towards God. You have broken your vows of repentance, &c.

2. God Himself finds the reason for His mercy. Here is the drift of the thought—the Lord is a patient God, and determines to make His patience glorious. God also would illustrate in the salvation of a sinner, not only His patience, but His sovereign and abundant mercy towards sinners. God can, by saving such a one as thou art, not only glorify His patience and grace, but display His power. It is evident that it is not an easy task to conquer thee. But now, it may be that a soul here present is saying, "Well, I can see that God can thus find a motive for mercy in Himself, when there is none in the sinner, but why is it that the Lord is chastening me as He is?" Possibly you are sick in body, have been brought low in estate, and are grievously depressed in mind. God now, in our text, goes on to explain—

3. His dealings with you, that you may not have one hard thought of Him. It is true He has been smiting you, but it has been with a purpose and in measure. "I have refined thee, but not with silver." You have been put into the furnace of affliction, but not—note the "but,"—"*but* not with silver." Now, when silver is refined it requires the most vehement heat of all metals. God has not brought upon you the severest troubles. You have been chastised, but not as you might have been, nor as you deserved to have been.

4. The Lord declares that the time of trial is the chosen season for revealing His love to you: "I have chosen thee," &c. God seeth the things that thall be as though they were; everything is *now* with Him.

5. Lest the soul should forget it, the Lord repeats again the point He began with, and unveils the motives of His grace once more. What is the 11th verse but the echo of the 9th? God cannot save you, sinner, for your own sake; you are not worth the saving. Yet the Lord declares that He will refrain from wrath. He will have mercy upon you, O broken heart, for His own sake. Plead the merits of Christ, &c. If you will go to Him in Christ Jesus, though you be all but damned already, and feel that your death-warrant is signed; He will not, He cannot, reject you. Throw yourself at the cross-foot, and say, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief;" and God will never tarnish His name by thy destruction. And then He adds, "And I will not give my glory unto another." But if a soul should perish while trusting in the blood of Christ, the glory of God would go over to Satan.

II. THE RECLAIMING OF THE BACKSLIDER.

1. Backsliding professor, your case is more evidently meant in the text even than that of the sinner, for God was speaking to His own people Israel in these remarkable words. Now your

crime, if anything, is a more censurable one than that of the sinner. I can see no more reason why God should have mercy upon you than upon the ungodly; indeed, I see more reason for punishing you, for you have made a profession and belied it. How great your guilt! You see there is no reason for God's grace that can be found in your person or in your character, but it is found in the divine heart.

2. Observe, that God, having thus declared the reason of His love to the backslider, goes on to tell him that the present sufferings, which he is now enduring as the result of his backslidings, should be mitigated. "I have refined thee, but not with silver," &c.

3. Then comes His next word: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Though you are not open backsliders, perhaps you may be worse than those who are.

CONCLUSION.—Let us go one and all, whether we be unsaved sinners or backsliders, or may suspect ourselves to be either the one or the other—let us go to the dear fountain of His blood, whose open veins are the gates of healing to us; and together let us rejoice that He for His mercy's sake can save us, and magnify Himself by the deed of mercy.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No.* 1041.

THE FURNACE OF AFFLICTION.

xlviii. 10. *I have chosen thee, &c.*

No one can read the history of God's ancient people without perceiving the wonderful compassion of God. Their numerous transgressions frequently call for the exercise of His justice; but He spared them in mercy. Sometimes He exercised them with heavy trials, placing them in the furnace of affliction; and it appears from the context that a consignment to such an ordeal has been salutary in its influence. A furnace is a fireplace or crucible for melting and refining gold or other metals (Prov. xvii. 3, xxvii. 21). Sometimes it is the emblem of cruel bondage (Deut. iv. 20, Jer. ix. 4). Also of judgments and severe and grievous afflictions, by which God punishes the rebellious (Ezek. xxii. 18–20). By the furnace of affliction He also tries and proves His people, as in the text.

I. **This furnace is afflictive.** It is composed of numerous severe trials. 1. *The scantiness of temporal things.* 2. *Bodily afflictions.* 3. *Bereavements.* 4. Domestic trials of various kinds from ungodly relatives—refractory and disobedient children, &c. &c. Thousands of God's people have been in this furnace. Even Jesus was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

II. **This furnace is divinely appointed.** Afflictions are not the result of chance (Job v. 6); not to be traced to mere natural causes; not the works of our enemies merely. They imply the moral government of God, and the wise and gracious arrangement of His providence. Every event is either His appointment, or has His all-wise permission (see Isa. xlv. 7; Job ii. 10, xxxiv. 29). Such views of the subject have reconciled and supported the minds of the godly under their various afflictions (Job xxiii. 14; Ps. xxxi. 15; Lam. iii. 27). What a blessing that all is arranged by infinite wisdom and love! (H. E. I. 143 179–188, 3675, 3676).

III. **For God's people this furnace is not vindictive, but gracious.** Divine chastisement may be a kind of punishment for sin committed. It frequently supposes some fault, which it is intended to correct. But sometimes men are persecuted "for righteousness' sake" (Matt. v. 10). God will suffer affliction to befall us when we are cold and indifferent in His cause. But such punishment is not like that inflicted on the wicked. Punishment may be *vindictive* or *corrective*. The one is in wrath, the other in love; the one is for the good of society, the other for the good of the

individual, to recover from the evil which affliction is intended to correct. God may be *angry* with His child, and not *hate* him. He may chastise him with His rod, yet love him with His whole heart (Heb. xii. 5–11; H. E. I. 56–74, 116, 189–196).

IV. This furnace is proportionate. That is, God will regulate its heat according to the circumstances of His people who may be placed there (Mal. iii. 3; 1 Cor. x. 13; Isa. xliii. 2; Zech. iii. 9; Heb. iv. 15; H. E. I. 198, 3677). The paternal relation He bears to His people will not permit Him to deal with them after the manner of the "fathers of our flesh." There can be no caprice, no unwise or intemperate anger in Him; He treats them tenderly (Ps. ciii. 8, 9, 13, 14). Compassion is mixed with the severest dispensations, and a wise distinction made between the different members of His family.

V. The tendency of this furnace is beneficial. "I have *chosen* thee in the furnace of affliction." A more proper translation would have been, "I have *tried* thee," &c. [Delitsch: "I have *proved* thee"]. By affliction of various kinds I have proved thy faith, hope, patience, and love (H. E. I. 75–84). Observe, God has nevertheless chosen some in the furnace of affliction. He has met them there, and by His Spirit has subdued them, and brought them to repentance, faith, and consecration to Himself. The furnace of affliction has been instrumental in their conversion. The design of a position in this furnace is to purify the Christian from sin, to wean from the world, &c. The believer emanates from this furnace improved, refined (James i. 2, 3; 1 Peter i. 6, 7, &c.; H. E. I. 85–90, 204–212, 3696–3702). Afflictions exercise the graces of the Christian (Rom. v. 3–5) They preserve from sin. They assimilate the soul to Christ, who was "a man of sorrows." They show the frailty of human life, and the vanity of the world. They teach sympathy with others (H. E. I. 135, 136). They make very humble, and break the haughty mind, and bring down the lofty thought (ch. xxxviii. 15). They induce a spirit of prayer (Ps. lxxvii. 2, &c.) In short, God, by placing His people in the furnace of affliction, is educating them for heaven (H. E. I. 112–115, 215).

APPLICATION.—1. Let the sublime design of this furnace induce patience and submission. 2. Remember the time of trial is but short. Called the *day* of adversity—the *hour* of affliction—but *for a moment* (H. E. I. 217, 218, 3705, 3706). — *Helps for the Pulpit*, 1st series, pp. 175–178.

Affliction as a furnace (α):—

1. A furnace is prepared for gold (Prov. xvii. 3). So afflictions are appointed for the saints, who are compared to gold.

2. A furnace refines gold, and makes it much purer than before; so afflictions refine and make more holy (Job xxiii. 10).

3. A furnace is made sometimes very hot, according to the kind and condition of the metal; so are afflictions, sometimes, very grievous, heavy, and trying, as the case requires. (β)

4. A furnace melts the gold, and makes it soft before it is refined; so afflictions those whom they are meant to purify.

5. A furnace will destroy tin, lead &c., and also the drossy part of gold so afflictions burn up the loose and hypocritical, and purge from His people all their corruptions.

6. The metal, when it comes forth from the furnace, is more prepared for its proper use; so are the people of God when they come forth from affliction. Therefore, let us be cheerful and hopeful while we are in the furnace.—*B. Keach.*

(α) See also outline: "The Fiery Ordeal of the Church," vol. i. p. 847.

(β) It requires an excessive heat to purify silver, and to consume all its dross. Were God to keep His people in the furnace till all their dross, sin, and corruption were removed they would be utterly consumed. His chastisements are, therefore, not fierce, but gradual; in mercy, and not in rigid justice.—*Dr. Gill.*

GOD'S UNCHANGEABLENESS THROUGHOUT ETERNITY.

xlviii. 12. *I am He; I am the first, I also am the last.*

Having called on the Jews in Babylon to attend to what He was now about to say by His servant the Prophet, God begins by asserting that He is the same, the true and only God, who existed before all things, and therefore was able to accomplish all His purposes and promises of deliverance. The text introduces us to a subject of tremendous import—*God's unchangeableness throughout eternity.* "The eternity and immutability of God are in their own nature inseparable, and are so generally united in the Holy Scriptures, that the passages which declare the one, declare or imply the other also."

I. GOD IS ETERNAL.

1. *Reason itself claims this attribute for God.* Nor was it unknown even to the heathens. Proclus, a follower of Plato, proved God to be eternal, because He exists of Himself. Thales defined God to be *a being* that is without beginning and end; before all things; and who was never born (H. E. I. 2253; P. D. 1492, 2536).

2. *What reason teaches, the Scriptures assert.* They represent God's eternity to be — (1.) An eternity of *duration*, "I am He; I am the first, I also am the last" (Ps. xc. 2). Not merely everlasting, but eternal! He had no beginning, even as He shall have no end. This is the difference between the eternity of God and that of the angels and of "the spirits of just men made perfect." They are, by the will of God, never to end; but, by His will also, they came into being. But to His being there was no beginning! (2.) An eternity of *perfection.* There has been in Him no development of excellence, as in Him there will be no diminution of it. "*From* everlasting *to* everlasting, Thou art GOD!" All that is involved in that great name He always was, and always will be! (See pp. 187, 188, and outlines on ch. lvii. 15).

II. GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE—eternally unchangeable. "I am He,"—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

1. *Unchangeableness is an essential perfection of God.* If He were subject to "variableness or the shadow of turning," He would not be a perfect and eternal being, &c. When, therefore, it is said that God repents or alters His purpose, it must not be supposed that His nature changes, but that the Holy Spirit accommodates His language to the general comprehensions of men, &c. (H. E. I. 2254–2256). He continues always the same—(1.) In His existence He cannot cease to be (Ps. cii. 27). (2.) In His nature or essence — He cannot cease to be what He is in every perfection. (3.) In His purposes (Isa. xlvi. 10, xiv. 24). (4.) In His promises to His people; in His threatenings against the wicked; and in all His predictions (Num. xxiii. 19).

2. *All these declarations are in harmony with the teachings of Scripture and the conclusions of Reason.* (1.) Scripture (Mal. iii. 6; Ps. xxxiii. 11; Isa. xliv. 10; James i. 17), &c. (2.) Reason. As God is self-existent—caused by none, so He can be changed by none. As He preceded all and caused all, so His sovereign will determined the relations which all things are permitted to sustain to Him. As He is infinite in duration, He cannot know succession or change. As He is infinite in all perfection of knowledge, &c., therefore He cannot change; for nothing can be added to or taken from the infinite—any change would make Him less than infinite before or after.

The unchangeableness of God is confirmed (1.) by the stability of His

natural government; (2.) by His moral government and the identity of the several dispensations of grace. But it does not exclude the exercise of dispositions and affections, nor involve a stoical indifference to the welfare of His creatures generally, or the character which may be assumed by moral agents. Nor does it involve uniformity of action or relation, much less fatalism, &c. (H. E. I. 3750–3753).

III. SOME PRACTICAL LESSONS WHICH THIS GREAT SUBJECT TEACHES.

1. *It assures us of the essential Divinity of the Christ.* The application to our Lord Jesus Christ of the terms here used by God to describe Himself, places His Deity beyond doubt (Rev. i. 8, 17, xxii. 13; and many other passages which express or imply eternity). Hold fast the vital fact of our Lord's Divinity. That gone, all is gone. "A *divine* Christ is the central sun of Christianity; quench it, and all is confusion, worse confounded." Rev. i. 8 did more than any other passage towards preventing Dr. Doddridge from assenting to the Socinian theory, which reduces our Lord to a deified creature.

2. *It assures us of the fulfilment of God's promises, and the accomplishment of His plans.* (Jer. x. 10; Dan. iv. 34; Isa. lx. 19; 2 Pet. iii. 8, 9).

3. *It affords "strong consolation" amid all the trying changes of this mortal state.* To this eternal and unchanging God we may commit ourselves with unwavering confidence, assured that He is both able and willing to sustain, &c.

4. *It should stimulate us to seek stability of character.* (Eph. v. 1; Ps. lxxvii. 7, cviii. 1). How reasonable and weighty is the admonition which follows the declaration of our Saviour's unchangeableness in Heb. xiii. 9.

5. *It should alarm the impenitent.* What folly and audacity is there in rebellion against God, since an eternal being is offended thereby! How dreadful to lie under the displeasure of an eternal God! (Jer. x. 10.) We are charged by this glorious Being with a message of reconciliation to you (2 Cor. v. 18–21). — *Alfred Tucker.*

THE CREATOR.

xlviii. 13. *Mine hand also hath laid the foundation, &c.*

It seems to be an axiom of modern philosophy that all human knowledge has been progressive, from the roughest fanciful guesses to the safely applied science of our days. Assuming this, we can only account for the recognition of the Oneness of the Creator and the Unity of Creation, not only in the age of Isaiah, but in that of Moses and in that of the Patriarchs, by attributing it to God's own revelation of Himself to man. This verse brings to mind the sublimely simple and authoritative declaration with which that revelation opens, and it claims our attention in the same calm way to the terrestrial and celestial manifestations of the Divine handiwork.

I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH. The solid earth has been regarded in all ages as the type of all that is "sure and firm set." But how does its enormous axis remain unbent? Why does not its crust fall in upon the attracting centre, or why do not the resisting forces shatter it? Because matter and forces have been balanced and adapted by Infinite Wisdom and Power (see xl. 12; Job xxxviii. 4–7). But it is not merely a dead weight and bulk. There is incessant physical and chemical action from the outermost aërial limit to the inmost metallic core. Change, decay, renewal, progress, are incessantly busy upon it. Individuals, races, and types all yield place to more advanced successors. The writer of the Book of Job saw the mountains falling and coming to naught, and the rivers

wearing the stones. Close research reveals even land and sea changing positions. "The mountains depart and the hills are removed." Earthquake, volcano, ice, storm, flood, all contribute to the constant ruin—

"The hills are shadows, and they flow
From form to form, and nothing stands:
They melt like mist, the solid lands,
Like clouds they shape themselves and go."

Yet the earth, the platform of all these changes, continues stedfast and intact: through all seeming change there is real establishment. Day follows night; spring follows winter. Mountain ridges always lift up their crests on the continents; rivers flow down to the seas; varied life peoples the plains, the forests, the air, the waters. New dynasties, civilisations, faiths replace the old. And there is continuous progress; from "chaos and old night" to light and order; thence to beauty and life; thence on to consciousness, sensation, will, thought, soul, worship.

It requires a stronger foundation to keep principles firm, while details change, than if all change were impossible. Strongest, when all changes are dominated into orderly measured advancement, "With ebb and flow conditioning their march." The conditions are met by the declaration that God's hand "hath laid the foundation of the earth," of life, of human society (Ps. cxix. 90, 91).

II. THE OVER-ARCHING HEAVENS.

"My right hand hath spanned the heavens." The mind is utterly lost in the attempt to realise a personal Being as ordering and dominating only the earth's changes throughout all time. What, then, of One who not only "sitteth upon the circle of the earth," of which "the inhabitants are as grasshoppers;" but who "stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them abroad as a tent to dwell in;" who extends them from system to system throughout the space depths, and rules them from eternity to eternity? Thought dies in trying to realise only unoccupied immensity, much more in grappling with the interaction of interminable forces on the atoms of numberless worlds ranging in streams and galaxies throughout it, or scattered in solitary grandeur. "End is there none," exclaim the angels in the poem of Richter, "whereof we ever heard, neither is there beginning." Philosophy on such grounds declares a personal God unthinkable. But this is only a testimony to the weakness and limitation of thought, and disqualifies it at once as the sole judge of Divine truth and Divine possibility.

The demonstrated unity of material and action throughout space and time establish the existence of one everlasting directive Mind. Otherwise Night and Nothingness have evolved all the living wonder within us and around us, which is more "unthinkable" yet, than that one guiding Being, who

"Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent."

Telescopy reveals this infinity of worlds as to number. God here declares that His right hand grasps them all. The universality of gravitation and the teachings of the spectroscope emphasise the unity of Matter, Force, and Law. The microscope reveals that bountiful Wisdom which extends to creatures beneath our visual ken. Logical and mathematical deductions from observed physical and chemical phenomena are taken to prove that the infinitesimal atoms are the originators of all forces, and that all things thus appear to create themselves. Either, then, every atom is a deity, and these free and powerful agents must at some distant epoch have conferred and agreed upon their future action under all possible conditions, with a view to the successive ends to be produced, and each must ever since have kept infallibly faithful thereto, or there is One God, wise enough and powerful enough to "call unto them," and to cause them to "stand up together." This is the view which

has stood the test of the ages. "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things" (1 Cor. viii. 6; H. E. I. 353–359, 1491–1494).

There is no part of nature, not even the whirling nebula, the flying comet, or the solitary wandering meteorite, in which law and force are not. Therefore no point of space is without God. And nothing has leaked out from the hollow of His hand. The infinitely great and the infinitely little have not. In spite of all the apparent contradictions of life and of history, man has not. The believer realises that he has not, and will not. In the midst of darkness and perplexity we may well remember that our restless, pain-fraught circumstances never shall. We may remind the sinner that he has not and cannot. Even "hell is naked before God, and destruction hath no covering." This truth may be ignored for a while, but rocks and mountains shall be powerless to hide it one day. God's grasp will soon tighten itself irresistibly. Shall it prove the embrace of the all-loving Father, or of the consuming unquenchable fire?

III. THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN THESE GREAT WORKS.

God has founded the earth and His right hand spans the heavens. He has not done His marvellous work without well-determined purpose. But "who hath known the mind of the Lord?" The soul can gather hints. Upon the laying of earth's corner-stone, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Why? Could it be at the forecast of all the sin, the misery, and death of which its surface was to become the theatre, and upon which the heavens continue to look down? Has any human heart ever experienced that high degree of happiness and satisfaction here, which could have inspired by anticipation their rapturous strains? Or can we believe that they arose in response to any such cheerless vision as that final future to which science looks as the most hopeful prospect she dares to cherish from the long interaction of her all-potent all-promising atoms? Sir William Thompson has expressed it for us:—"That the sun, with all his planets fused into his mass, shall roll a black ball through infinite space." That is, that life having worn itself out in the weary struggle from form to form, shall at last fruitlessly inherit only the blackness of darkness for ever. Their visions were brighter than these, or no joyous shouts would have applauded the work of creation. But whatever were their visions, these are facts:—

1. The heavens have been God's grand lesson-books for the instruction and elevation of His children (Ps. viii. and xix.)

2. The earth has been the scene of revelations of His character, which we cannot believe to be surpassed by any vouchsafed to any other portion of His universe: His judgments on sin; His manifestations of mercy; His tabernacling amongst men in the person of His Son; the death on the cross for the redemption of lost humanity; the nobleness, sincerity, patience, unselfishness, and forgiveness of God manifested in the spiritual education of His children.

3. The long process of sin and redemption shall at length have a glorious consummation. "The righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." God works in nature by stern and relentless agents; and sin, pain, and death will be found one day to have borne necessary parts in elaborating the new creation, which shall know them again no more for ever. Whether the same grand laws working in the same matter shall continue to evolve ever-new phases of order, life, and beauty out of "the infinite resource of the divine mind," or whether matter and laws themselves along with us shall be gloriously changed, we know not. Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.—*William Seward.*

THE UNITY OF THE GODHEAD.

xlviii. 16. *Come ye near Me, hear ye this, &c.* (α)

There can be little doubt as to the real character of the personage who utters these words. (Context.) Can it be questioned that the personage who claims such attributes as these claims also to be divine? Yet it is equally clear that although He is divine, there is some sort of distinction to be observed between Him and Jehovah, for He was sent by Jehovah. We have here the mystery of one Divine person sending another. And we are irresistibly reminded of the passages of the New Testament in which our Lord asserts that He cometh forth from the Father, and also that He is furnished and equipped by His Spirit for accomplishing the great work of human redemption. It is clear, then, if we appeal to such statements as those of our text, that we are justified in affirming the fundamental truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ to be imbedded in the teaching of the Old Testament Scripture. This, it may be, is what is meant by the expression, "I have not spoken in secret from the beginning." Our Lord, during His ministry upon earth, when arguing with certain of the Sadducees, pointed to a saying of Moses, and told them that it implicitly contained the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead (Luke xx. 37). It may be, then, that the Messiah meant to indicate, by the expression just quoted, that the doctrine of His true and essential Godhead, although latent in the sacred page, was yet not so much of a secret that it could not have been brought to light by the earnest and diligent search of a God-directed and God-illuminated inquirer. But whether this be so or not, we may be perfectly confident that the doctrine in some form or other is contained in the elder revelation. If it could not be found there, grave doubt would be cast upon it. But there are traces of it to be found—truth, as it were, in embryo, waiting for development—and some of these I shall make it my endeavour to point out. My contention is simply this: that simultaneously with the grand revelation of the unity of the Godhead which was given to Israel, there was revealed in shadowy outline, in hidden rather than in plain and explicit statement, a distinction of persons existing in that Godhead; there was the full stream of doctrine, and side by side with it there was the little rill, but both of them equally proceeding from the throne of God. In the background of the picture, projected before the eyes of the chosen people, stood a second majestic figure, which did not interfere with the main purpose of the scene, but still made itself felt; was seen, though dimly seen; emerged more and more into the light as the ages rolled on, and at last stood out to the view in all the full proportion of its magnificence and its beauty. Abraham was the great founder of Monotheism at a time when the world was overspread by the worship of gods many and lords many; once in all probability a sharer in the general ignorance and superstition, he was brought by God to a knowledge of the truth, and sent forth as a witness to it amongst the nations of the earth. Now, it was obviously of extreme importance to keep such a man's conception of the Unity of the Godhead distinct and clear, and yet, on a certain occasion, an incident occurred which must have tended in no slight degree to confuse and to bewilder him if his conception of the Unity of the Godhead prohibited his believing in the distinction of persons (Gen. xviii.) It is hard to believe that unless this personage was divine, he would have addressed Him and pleaded with Him as he did. Who was the person here spoken of as "the Lord," spoken of as "communing with Abraham," and spoken of as

finally departing from him? And no less so when he was upon Mount Moriah (Gen. xxii.) "From me!" What a singular confusion there must have been if there be no distinction of persons in the unity of the Godhead, &c. Pass with me now to the story of Jacob (Gen. xxxii.) Compare with the narrative in Genesis the comment upon it given in Hosea xii. Now, who was this "angel" whom Jacob saw face to face? If he was not divine, I say again, what a frightful mental confusion and perplexity the Monotheist patriarch must have been involved in! Pass on to the time of Moses (Exod. xxiii.) Very singular language indeed if the angel be only a created angel. But yet, what do we find in chap. xxxiii.? We find Moses prostrate on his face before God in an agony of supplication pleading for the restoration of the angel in whom the name of God is. Advance to the book of Joshua (chap. v.) Who is the speaker? A created angel do you say? Nay, no created angel that was ever created would dare to receive worship. These passages are merely specimens, a few amongst many. In the life of Jacob, of Moses, and of Abraham, especially in that part of it which refers to the Egyptian handmaid, Hagar; in the story of Manoah, at the birth of Samson; in the book of Daniel, where, not Gabriel is the angel of Jehovah, the messenger of the covenant, but the mysterious person "clothed in linen," &c. In all these and in many similar statements, I might find the corroboration of the view which it has been my desire and endeavour to set before you. In passage after passage of the ancient Scriptures, a personage appears who claims the attributes of Jehovah, who speaks as Jehovah, and directs and commands as Jehovah, who accepts homage and sacrifice as Jehovah, who is, in fact, to use the language of my text, Jehovah sent by Jehovah. Jealously as the Scripture guards the unapproachable majesty of God, is it conceivable that such an interming-ling could have been possible if the personage in question had no right or title to be considered divine? Surely not; and I venture, therefore, to consider it satisfactorily established, that together with the great revelation of the Unity of the Godhead came, not as plainly and as explicitly, but quite as truly, not indeed in the development, but in the germ, in shadow, and in outline rather than in solid substance, a revelation of a distinction of persons existing in that unity, a revelation which prepared the way for the great doctrine of the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God. We are told that we degrade Deity by supposing God to be incarnate. On such a subject I think it is most suitable for such people as we are to keep a reverent silence, for none amongst us is competent to express an opinion as to what is suitable or unsuitable, appropriate or inappropriate, to the Divine essence. But may we not go a step farther, and say that such an objection as this has its root in our human inability to conceive adequately the love of God? (H. E. I. 851, 852, 4809–4815).—*Gordon Calthorp, M.A., The Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xxvii. 33–35.

(α) Some refer this whole verse to Isaiah (Kimchi, Hitzig, Knobel), and many the second clause of it alone (Calv., Zuingl., Musculus, Gesen., Meyer, Hengst., Umbr., Hahn). Others think there is a confusion of style (Jarchi, Rosenm.) But the only consistent view makes the Son of God the Speaker here, as in the last verse (Augustine, Basil, Jerome, Œcolamp., Vitr., Alex., Herd., Stier). The same is true throughout the chapter, though the distinctness of Divine Persons comes into full relief only here at the close. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made that is made" (John i. 3).

The voice of love is here the same as in the appeal to Jerusalem in the Gospel, "How often would I have gathered thy children together!" (Matt. xxiii. 37). The Word of God "has not spoken in secret from the be-beginning," but from the hour of creation has been the Revealer of the Father's will. The limit "from the time it came to be," is the same as in Prov. viii. 23, 27, "from the beginning, or ever the earth was," when

creation came into being. The construction, "the LORD hath sent me and His Spirit" (Orig., Vitr., Knobel, Gesen., Herd., Alex., Hahn), is disproved by the loss of emphasis, the last clause having thus neither the same subject nor object with the rest of the verse, by the harshness of the construction, and the want of the objective sign. The Word, who speaks, is the mental object of the whole statement, first, as the Divine Revealer, and next, as divinely sent and revealed. The mission here is not the Incarnation, but the signal providence of the Return from Babylon. So in Zechariah, "After the glory hath He sent me to the nations that spoiled you; for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye, . . . and ye shall know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me" (Zech. ii 7–9.) This mission of the Word to deliver captive Israel was an earnest of that fuller and later message, when "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."—*Birks: Comm.*, pp. 246, 247.

A TREASURY OF GREAT TRUTHS.

xlviii. 16, 17. *Come ye near unto me, &c.*

It is God in Christ who here speaks to us (see preceding note by Mr. Birks). A treasury of great truths; we can look only at a few of them.

I. THE GRACIOUS INVITATION GOD GIVES US. "Come ye near unto me."

In all the means of grace God comes very near to us, and would have us approach Him. He says to us, as Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near to me, my son, that I may bless thee." He would not have us stand at a distance, but draw nigh; not treat Him as a stranger, but as a personal friend; not be content to be outer-court worshippers, but advance as to a footing of holy personal intimacy (1 John i. 3; H. E. I. 3427, 3428, 3448, 3449).

God would have us close the ear to the voice of the tempter and the seductions of the world, and open the ear to the whispers of His Word and the pleadings of His Spirit within us. Those who would learn the lessons of heavenly wisdom must approach near to Him, and desire immediate communications from Him. Moses went up into the mount, while the elders stood afar off; we are permitted to imitate Moses, and we should do so. While Martha was troubled about many things, Mary sat at Jesus' feet.

The tendency of irreligion and worldliness is to separate the soul further and further from God; the tendency of all the influences of the Spirit upon the spiritual mind is to bring us nearer to the God we worship. There should be one continual desire: "Nearer, my God, to Thee," &c.

II. THE NEEDFUL WORK WHICH GOD ACCOMPLISHES IN HIS PEOPLE.

1. *He is their Teacher.* "I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit." No one can do this effectually but God. None but He has wisdom, patience, or power enough to deal with these hearts of ours which are always prone to depart from Him. The labyrinth of human ignorance has such a maze that none but He can penetrate it.

Divine teaching consists in opening the eyes of the understanding to perceive spiritual objects, and inclining the will to choose and pursue them.

It is most needful. God never acts in vain; unless His children needed His help as their teacher, He would not undertake to help them in this form. The necessity for His teaching arises from our spiritual blindness and native distaste for divine things; through sin all the faculties of the soul are left in the same condition as the body would be without light. Hence certain important Scripture sayings (Ps. cxix. 8; Isa. xlii. 6, 7, &c.; H. E. I. 3399, 2877–2882).

2. *He is their Guide.* "Which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." He leads them as well as instructs them, and makes dark providences the means of giving them spiritual light; for His Word and His providence are mutual interpreters. How did He teach Job? By philosophical lectures and a large scientific apparatus? No; but by strange and trying providences (H.E.I 99, 100, 133, 134).

III. THE CONDESCENDING RELATIONS HE SUSTAINS TO THEM.

1. *He is their Lord*—the sovereign of the Church. Let past experience encourage future hope. "This God is our God for ever and ever:" a changeless friend, an endless portion.

2. *He is the Redeemer of the Church.* He had redeemed the Israelites from Egypt; He was about to redeem them from Babylon. He will finally redeem His people from sin, death, and hell. However much the world overlooks the mystery of redemption, God Himself places the greatest stress upon it. It is that work from which He derives the highest glory, and the Church the noblest comfort. "The Lord thy redeemer" is a title in which He rejoices, and we should too.

3. *He is "the Holy One of Israel."* This expresses at once His own perfection and the influence He exerts on His people—not only holy, but also the author of holiness. To produce that in them is the purpose of all His dealings with them (Heb. xii. 10; Tit. ii. 14; H. E. I. 2842, 2843).

4. *He is thy God.* Let this crowning and all-comprehensive fact be kept constantly in mind, prompting us to devout worship and thankful service of Him to whom we owe life, breath, and all things that minister to our present well-being, and enable us to look forward without fear to the eternal future.—*Samuel Thodey.*

DIVINE NAMES AND DIVINE WORK.

xlviii. 17. *Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, &c.*

These words were spoken in dark and troublous times. They are fraught with instruction and comfort. In them we have—

I. DIVINE NAMES. They convey ideas of overwhelming greatness and glory, mingled with awful mysteriousness, and are worthy our careful consideration.

1. "*Lord.*" That is, Jehovah, the proper and incommunicable name of the Most High God. Represented in our version by the word LORD, printed in capitals. In the Pentateuch it is God's personal and covenant name. It is indicative of the attributes of self-existence, eternity, immutability, and perfect independence. How great and glorious is our God! (See outline on ch. xlii. 8.)

2. "*Redeemer*"—vindicator or deliverer. Isaiah addresses his countrymen as being actually in a state of captivity. (1.) Man is in a state of *spiritual* captivity—the worst sort of captivity. He is in bondage to *sin* (John viii. 34). Sin rules and reigns in him. He is a slave to his lusts (2 Pet. ii. 19). To *Satan* (2 Tim. ii. 16; Eph. ii. 2). To the *law.* Not having performed the requirements of that law, he is placed under arrest to it (Gal. iv. 24, 25, iii. 10). To *death* (Heb. ii. 15; John iii. 36). (2.) God, in Christ, is the great deliverer. No other way (Acts iv. 12; John viii. 36). The Gospel is glad tidings of salvation to poor, guilty captives ready to perish. Deliverance has been effected through Christ. By a great ransom (1 Cor. vi. 20; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19). By conquest. He not merely paid the ransom price, but He destroyed the power of man's enslavers. See the argument of Christ (Luke xi. 21, 22; *cf.* 1 John iii. 8). He rescues sinners from the thraldom of Satan, and gives them the liberty of the sons of God. Multitudes have been delivered, and are now in a state of perfect freedom (Rom. viii. 1). You may be delivered. Is realised by faith. No other way.

3. "*The Holy One of Israel.*" This name is often applied to Him in Scripture. "There are other beings in the universe that are in a sense holy—angels and saints are holy, but He is 'the Holy One.' His holiness is essential and underived. It is the eternal source and the absolute standard of all holiness in the universe. Other holy beings to Him are only as

the dim stars of night to the unclouded sun of day. He is the immaculate fountain of all holiness, the Father of lights whence every ray of purity in the universe proceeds." His holiness is incomparable (Exod. xv. 11; 1 Sam. ii. 2; Isa. xl. 25; Rev. xv. 4). His holiness is manifested in His words and His works, especially the work of human redemption. Is pledged for the fulfilment of His promises (Ps. lxxxix. 35). Should produce reverential fear (Exod. xv. 11; 1 Sam. vi. 20; Ps. v. 7; Rev. xv. 4).

II. DIVINE WORK.

1. *Teaching.* (1.) The *need* of a divine teacher, for we are ignorant as to spiritual knowledge (Eph. iv. 18). Naturally our understanding is so darkened that we see no beauty in Christ that we should desire Him (1 Cor. ii. 14). (2.) We *have* a divine teacher. God, by His Spirit (Luke xii. 12; John xiv. 26; 1 Cor. ii. 13; 1 John ii. 20, 27). By His incarnate Son. "God's great lesson-book is the cross of Christ. All truth is condensed there. Everything you have to learn, or to do, or enjoy, is written upon that page. It is the babe's alphabet, and it is the philosopher's compendium. There are the glories which are to be expanded throughout eternity. God holds the clue to that divine labyrinth of awful, blessed mystery. Only the Holy Spirit can unlock those spiritual passages."—*J. Vaughan.*

2. *Leading or guiding.* "I am thy conductor and guide." (1.) We *need* a divine guide. "We are pilgrims to eternity. We are in the labyrinth of error and sin. Life is like a heath with paths stretching in various directions. Many appear pleasant and safe that lead astray. We are often bewildered, and often choose wrongly." (2.) We *have* a divine guide. God Himself engages to be our guide. He is the only infallible guide—infinitely wise, powerful, good, gracious. He guides His people by His *Word.* Its precepts instruct; its revelations enlighten; its examples encourage and warn us. *By His Spirit,* acting directly upon our spirit (Isa. xxx. 21). *By His providence,* pointing out the way by the indications of circumstances and current events. *By the example of Christ. By the counsel of His servants* (Ps. lxxvii. 20). The wise and good are here to direct us. (3.) God guides His people in the way they *should* go, not in the way they *would* go—that is man's interpretation. There is a way in which we should walk—a divine way, clear to those who will see it. God's way is not always our way, but it is always the right, the best, the safest, and the happiest way. This assurance should always cheer and comfort us.

Unconverted sinner! you must move forward—you must "go," it is the law of your being. But *how* will you "go"? with God, or without Him? You are free to choose which you will do. Take God as your guide, the wisest, the best of all leaders. To refuse divine leadership is to grope in darkness, and ultimately to perish.—*Alfred Tucker.*

GOD OUR TEACHER AND LEADER.

xlviii. 17. *I am the Lord thy God, who teacheth thee to profit, &c.*

How beautiful and impressive are the "I am's" of God! Only from God has the declaration "I am" its full meaning. But God does not isolate Himself. What He is, He is for His people.

We must go out of ourselves to get real blessing for ourselves; and to whom shall we go? The heart must have a Person to love, to lean on, to live for. No doctrine, no idea, no creed can take the place of the Person —"I am the Lord thy God." The apostle of love seems to have taken special heed of the self-revelations of Christ; for in his pages we meet with some of the glorious "I am's" of Christ (John viii. 12; vi. 35; xiv. 6; x. 7; xv. 1; viii. 58; xi. 25). In the text God is revealed as our Teacher and

Leader; and "Learn of Me," and "Follow Me," are two most important commands of Jesus Christ.

I. There is an important relation between these two offices of our Divine Master. Not every teacher is a leader, not every leader a true teacher. Theory and practice are often divorced; words and works are not always wedded. But Christ is like a general who trains his soldiers in the barracks and leads them on the field, or like a traveller who braves the dangers and endures the toils of opening up a country, and then describes its beauties, dilates upon its capacities, and adds to the common fund of scientific knowledge. Does Jesus teach us to "pray and not to faint?" He also leads (Mark i. 35; Luke vi. 12); does He teach us to glorify God by our "good works?" He "went about doing good." Does He teach us to love our enemies, and pray for those who despitefully use us? How grandly are we led by His dying prayer, "Father, forgive them!" Are we to "seek first the kingdom of God," according to His teaching? It was His meat and drink to do His Father's will. He truly "teaches us to profit, and leads us by the way we should go." These are the two great forces which aid in the formation of Christian character, and the development of Christian life (H.E.I. 894–899).

The teaching of our Master is sometimes out of the book of affliction and sorrow. We have been drawn away from Him by much resting in creature strength; He is jealous for our sakes; so He teaches us our folly, and weakness, and sin; and then leads us into His wisdom, and strength, and holiness. Perhaps His lesson comes out of the book of poverty and distress. He strips us, that we may be clothed with change of raiment. In multitudes of ways does our Lord teach His people, but ever to the end that He may lead them in the way in which they should go. All the way along He is Teacher and Leader, and we love to have it so. The thought of His instruction encourages us, while His leadership emboldens us.

II. Contemplate the words "who leadeth thee." Read them in the light of Scripture thoughts and incidents. How they remind us of God leading His people from the thraldom of Egypt (Exod. xiii. 21). In Moses' song there is a beautiful figure to help us in understanding our Lord's leading (Deut. xxxii. 11, 12). Passing on, we come to the poem of the shepherd-king (Ps. xxiii.) And then we find David's putting into the lips of wisdom the words, "I lead in the way of righteousness." Take another example; now from Isaiah (xlii. 16). How soothing the words of Jeremiah! (xxxi. 9).

III. What spirit shall we manifest in view of this truth? "Suffer thyself, O Christian, to be led! Presume not at any time either to linger or to precede. Follow thy Shepherd patiently, gladly, and constantly. Keep close to His footsteps. Go unhesitatingly through this dry and thirsty land of sorrows, trials, and disappointments. Let no hurry of business delay, no burden of care prevent thee. Let not the sorrows of thy heart prove too overwhelming to deter, no joys of this life too captivating to detain thee from thy God" (*Stephenson* on Psalm xxiii.)

> "When we cannot see our way,
> Let us trust and still obey;
> He who bids us forward go
> Cannot fail the way to show."

CONCLUSION.—Let us take our place by the psalmist, and with him in a spirit of humility, resignation, trustfulness, and hope, put up these petitions (Ps. v. 8; xxvi. 5; xxvii. 11; xxxi. 3; lxi. 2; cxxxix. 24; cxliii. 10). Thus shall we on earth have a true foretaste of the blessedness of that sinless place, where "the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, shall lead them, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."—*Walter J. Mayers: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xvii. pp. 228–230.

The Benefit of Afflictions.

xlviii. 17. *I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit.*

God can make all the objects by which men are surrounded, and all the scenes through which they are called to pass, produce just such effects in their minds as He sees best. He can blast prosperity, and bless adversity. He can make afflictions instructive and beneficial. It was while His people were in a state of adversity, and despairing of relief, that He undertook to comfort them, by reminding them of His power over them, His relation to them, and His tender regard for their spiritual good (ver. 12, 13, 16, 17). We find no intimation here that God would put an end to the afflictions of His people, but only that He was able to sanctify them, or cause them to have a salutary and desirable effect.

I. Afflictions may be profitable to the children of God. They are not in themselves joyous, but grievous; it is natural to dread them; even our Saviour recoiled from the prospect of His approaching sufferings; nevertheless they may eventually prove very beneficial:—

1. *By turning off their attention from the world.* Living in the world, and compelled in some measure to its concerns, they are prone to "mind earthly things" too exclusively; but afflictions have a direct tendency to turn away their eyes from beholding vanity, and to prepare them to attend to things of everlasting consequence.

2. *By turning off their affections from the world.* Many of its objects have an immense fascination for the human heart, and we are always in danger of giving them that place in our hearts which is due to God alone. But in the time of affliction men learn that in the world there is nothing to soothe and comfort them. When they find how little it can do for them, how apt it is to deceive them, and rob them of superior happiness, they learn to hate rather than to love it.

3. *By raising their affections to God, the source of all good.* By taking away every other ground of dependence and consolation, they may be said to drive them to the Fountain of all good. Thus they operate even upon the ungodly (Ps. cvii. 17–19). Much more is this likely to be their effect upon the righteous.

II. GOD is able to make afflictions profitable to His children. Afflictions do not necessarily sanctify; they make some men worse, and not better (2 Chron. xxviii. 22; Rev. ix. 20, xvi. 9, 21; H. E. I. 229–233); but God is able to teach each of His children how to turn them into sources of blessing:—

1. *He is able to bring Himself into their view.* As when the sun rises men cannot see the stars, so when God presents Himself before the minds of His people, they cannot see anything else. Or rather, they see Him in all things—in the providences and afflictions which have befallen them. But barely bringing Himself into their view, and turning off their attention from all created objects, will not afford relief; because men may behold God and be troubled (Ex. xiv. 24). It is therefore necessary to observe—

2. *That He can draw their affections as well as their attention towards Himself.* When He brings Himself into view of the afflicted, He can awaken every holy affection in their hearts, and give them a sensible enjoyment of Himself, which is far better than the enjoyment of sons, or of daughters, or of any earthly good (H. E. I. 116–142, 204–221).

III. These facts are fountains of consolation for God's afflicted children. What a deep and exhaustless well of comfort is this, that God bears a covenant relation to them, and has engaged to treat them as children! All His dispensations towards them are the genuine expressions of His fatherly care and kindness (Heb. xii.

6; Job v. 17–19, 27; 2 Cor. iv. 17). It is not necessary that they should know that their afflictions shall be removed or diminished; they may exercise faith, confidence, submission, patience, and even joy, while they know that the Lord is their God, and will certainly teach them to profit by those things which would otherwise sink them in sorrow and despair.

APPLICATION:—1. *Since God makes use of afflictions to keep His children near Him, it is clear that they are extremely prone to forsake Him.* He does not grieve nor afflict them willingly, but only because they will not regard His milder means of instruction. It is a certain sign that a child is very undutiful and disobedient, if nothing but repeated and severe corrections will restrain or reclaim him. We should humble ourselves before God because of our waywardness.

2. *Seeing that God chastises His children for their good, and teaches them to profit under His correcting hand, those who are suffered to live on in uninterrupted prosperity have reason to inquire whether they belong to the household of faith.* Prosperity is a thing to thank God for; but it is as frequently granted to the evil as to the good; and those who have been long in the enjoyment of it have good cause seriously to inquire whether their hearts are right with God, and whether He has not been granting their requests for outward prosperity and sending leanness into their souls.

3. *Since God afflicts His children only for their good, they have the best of all reasons for being submissive and cheerful in seasons of sorrow.*

4. *Since God afflicts His children only for their good, the severer the sufferings through which they are called to pass, the greater is the profit they may expect to derive from them in the end.* The oftener He puts them into the furnace of affliction, and the longer He continues them there, the brighter He means to bring them out.

5. *Since God teaches His children to profit by their afflictions, afflictions afford us a means of determining whether we belong to His family or not.*

6. *Since God can make afflictions profitable to His children, we may justly conclude that He can make them profitable to others also.* Though sinners hate instruction and despise reproof, yet they are not beyond the reach of divine power and divine grace. God has often used affliction as an instrument for the conversion of sinners (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12). — *Dr. Emmons: Works*, vol. iii. pp. 52–66.

THE PROFIT OF LIFE.

(A New Year Motto).

xlviii. 17. *I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.*

Inscribe these words on the banner that waves over our heads as we march through the year, that they may be always in sight, ready for use in all the varying turns of our experience. They are stored with rich promise, wise direction, sustaining comfort. This is a voice from heaven to explain God's dealings with us, to elevate our aims and to encourage our trust.

I. **The end which God has in view in the guidance of our lives, "profit."** This is His aim, and He would have us make it ours. "Profit" in heaven's vocabulary has not the meaning it bears on earth. The profit which the world pursues is material, but this is spiritual. That is often lost, and must be left behind at death; this endures unto life eternal, and is the only real profit, for it is a part of our very selves. The solemn utterance of Christ on this matter runs (Mark viii. 36, 37)—a statement which is reversed by those who mind earthly things. Not what you will *get*, but what you will *become*

should engage your attention. Your greatest wealth lies in yourselves, in your being renewed and sanctified. All other profit is of no value in comparison. Every advantage, talent, opportunity, which is not minted into this coin is wasted. Is this, then, the lofty purpose which you are throwing into your life? How few inquire—What will tell upon my spiritual interests? how many—How can I add to my worldly gains, and make a comfortable livelihood? I do not say you should never ask such a question, but only that it should have a subordinate place. Lot had an eye to worldly gain in selecting the plain of Sodom for his residence. The religious disadvantages and dangers of the step did not enter into his calculations. He first "pitched his tent toward Sodom," and then thought it would be a fine thing for his family to be settled in the city, where he would be held in consideration as a man of growing wealth. But spiritual profit—growing sympathy with what is pure and beneficent, closer resemblance to Christ—is the loftiest aim in life, and all our plans should be formed with a view to its acquisition. If this profit be wanting as the years roll by, life is a losing concern, leading to spiritual bankruptcy.

II. God engages to teach us how to extract profit from life. Everything may yield us profit, if we learn the happy art of taking the profit out of it. A naturalist has said that "the seeing eye is never in want of its proper aliment;" and the Christian soul never lacks the means of spiritual profit. The bee may find it delightful to roam far and wide through the long summer day, looking into the flowers and breathing their fragrance; but he is an idle drone if he bring home no profit for the hive. One man has neither the will nor the power to extract the honey from life's experience, while another finds profit in all that meets him. Two persons take a tour through an interesting country. One sees but little, and carelessly hurries past the grandest scenes and through the finest cities. The other comes home with large additions to his information, and with scenes impressed on his mind which he can recall long after with delight. Let me specify some of the departments of our life, and show how real profit may be derived from them. Take *our daily Bible-readings and our visits to God's house.* These are occasions of richest profit, but many miss it. Not to speak of those who lay aside the Bible for books that have a stronger interest for them, and rarely, if at all, frequent the sanctuary, to others these privileges come as a matter of course. No wonder there is small profit when none is expected. Believing prayer makes the Lord's day a day of blessing, and extracts profit from the poorest sermon. By the sorrows and difficulties of the week God sometimes sends us to His house with quickened appetite.—*Our joys and sorrows* may be made springs of profit. This is the very purpose of the Divine chastenings (Heb. xii. 10). —*Our intercourse with others* may furnish contributions to our spiritual wealth. Our closest friends should be the friends of Jesus, and from such companions we may get much profit by the interchange of thought and the influence of example; and even those who are otherwise minded may teach us to be gentle to the erring.—*Our very temptations,* if met with a firm resistance, will bring us a return of strength. —*Our daily work* may be made to yield us a better renumeration than mere wages, if we accept it as our God-appointed task.—In all these departments, if we take God for our teacher, life, with its changing scenes, will become a school of precious instruction, and a mine of solid wealth.

III. God engages to lead us by the way in which profit may be found. By "the way that thou shouldest go" we are to understand the experiences through which God sees it needful to lead us. "God has His plan for every man." Each requires a special discipline. Since God has taught His children the happy secret of profiting from the experiences of life,

they may be sure that the experiences will be such as to yield the profit which they most need, as the bee's faculty and instinct do not lack flowers. This assurance ought to nerve us alike for life's trials and life's work. It should silence every murmur. All envying of the lot of others, all impatience with our own, will vanish when we feel that we are where God placed us. Even in the severest afflictions this thought will stay the soul. It is part of God's plan to send trials upon us; they stand in His programme of our lives. Were any of them withheld we should lose their intended profit. Our very work has been pre-arranged (Eph. ii. 10). We are disposed to think that if our talents were better, our opportunities more favourable, we would serve God to greater purpose; but these are precisely what God sees we can use. Be it ours to inquire at every step, What good may I get here? what profit may I acquire? Would it not bring a truly happy year to import these principles into your life? Do they not furnish a sufficient answer to the question that has recently been discussed—"Is life worth living?" If you *live* while you live, if you have been taught of God to extract profit from life's experience, certainly life is well worth living. The ship constructed at great expense does not lie anchored in some quiet bay. The owners expect a return, and send her across the seas to trade in the ports of many lands. Their end is profit, and every day their vessel is laid up is a serious loss. So it is with our lives. If there is no real profit, there must be a sad, a fatal deficit.—*W. Guthrie, M.A.*

Spiritual Prosperity secured by Obedience only.

xlviii. 17–19. *Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, &c.*

Whatever may be the reason, in the Church there are frequently mournful complaints of the want of prosperity, both general and individual. Viewing the case only under one aspect, this might appear strange. For is not God with His people? &c. Whence, then, these complaints? Their true cause is in man, not in God. The terms here employed show us, that though the complaint is in accordance with fact, the fact might and ought to have been avoided. The real cause is found in negligence and disobedience of man. God's complaint implies censure; and teaches us that the limitation of the blessing which was promised in the most abundant fulness, is a reproving judgment, calling us to "consider our ways," and by renewed obedience and carefulness to remedy the evils which we ourselves have occasioned. Observe the remarkable manner in which it pleases God to address His people. It is not said, generally and alone, "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!". He speaks as sustaining certain characters, performing certain works. And in examining the terms employed in this divine record, we shall find that they include and suggest the reasons why the required obedience should be rendered. We have thus—

I. The fundamental character which God sustains in relation to His people, and as sustaining which He requires their obedience.

1. "*The Holy One of Israel.*" Redemption chiefly implies mercy, but by no means exclusively. It is set before us in the New Testament, with the strongest emphasis, as that exhibition and proof of love which, for its vastness and grandeur, claims to be regarded as the highest of all. But men are apt to take false views of love. These false views generally tend to very dangerous issues. With men, love is often an indulgent fondness, seldom rising above the limits of natural instinct, and possessing in

its character nothing distinctively moral.

2. "*Thus saith the Lord.*" This is the basis of the whole (Exod. iii. 14). He is essential being, independent, perfect, eternal. Whatever exists, exists by Him and for Him; every faculty, by Him given, should be for Him employed. No creature possesses the excellence for which we are commanded to love, worship, and serve Him. As far as possible, there must be a difference as complete and manifest between the service we render to any creature, and that which we render to God, as there is between the creature itself and God.

3. "*Thy Redeemer.*" Thus has He made Himself known to us. Thus will He be acknowledged, worshipped, and served by us. True, He is our Creator, our Preserver, our Sovereign; none of these truths are set aside by the evangelical revelation; still it is our duty to remember that the chief of His royal styles and titles, is that of Redeemer. It is as our Redeemer that we are to behold His glory, study His character, acknowledge, love, worship, and serve Him. In Himself, our true and highest good, He only becomes so to us when we approach Him as our Redeemer; acknowledging all the wickedness and weakness in us which that term implies.

But there is one character which the Scriptures teach us God always must sustain,—that of the most exalted moral excellence. We must never forget that He is "the Holy One of Israel" (H. E. I. 2316, 2317). This, then, is the character in which God addresses to us the commandments to which He requires us to hearken.

II. A PARTICULAR PROCEEDING IN WHICH IT PLEASES GOD, AS SUSTAINING THIS CHARACTER, TO REPRESENT HIMSELF AS ENGAGING. "I am the Lord thy God which teacheth," &c.

1. *God teaches us.* Advert to the principal methods which He is pleased to employ. But in whatever way the instruction is communicated, the object of it is always the same—our benefit and advantage.

2. *God is also our Guide.* "Which leadeth," &c. Distinctly asserted in the Word of God. The wisdom of ancient philosophy could never realise the doctrine of a particular providence. To the wisdom of the world it is still a stumbling-block. Observe the character of the guidance: "In the way that thou shouldest go." That we may perceive what that way is, let us remember what man is, and for what he is destined. There is nothing merely casual. Everything is wisely appointed or wisely permitted. And thus, putting together all these representations, is a foundation, broad and stable, laid for that enlightened, that deliberately chosen obedience which He requires.

III. THE OBEDIENCE WHICH HE CONSEQUENTLY REQUIRES FROM US.

1. God teaches us for our profit; it is therefore our duty to be learners, and that from first to last.

2. God leads us, &c.; it is therefore our duty to follow His guidance. But how? No pillar of cloud and fire goes before us, marking the way to sense. We walk by faith. What are the indications which faith must follow? (1.) His revealed will. He never leads in opposition to that. (2.) The specific duties indicated by every particular providence must be fulfilled. Let there be unhesitating submission, unreserved devotion. The old Vulgate employs a word that may suggest an illustration. *Gubernans te in vid.* A vessel sails from harbour destined to a certain port. To guide her safely is the task of the pilot, the *Gubernator.* In modern times, when navigation is so well understood, such a person is usually only employed where the navigation is difficult, from dangers known to himself, but unknown to the crew — perhaps close by the port where the voyage terminates.

3. God condescends to speak to us!

it is therefore our duty continually and reverently to hearken. "O that thou hadst," &c. It is not said, "O that thou hadst obeyed!" but, "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" Of course, obedience is implied, but the word actually used teaches us the real character of the obedience. The master issues his orders. The servant stands by attentively. He hearkens to them, perceives his duty, and goes to perform it. And thus must it be with us. (1.) We must hearken to His commandments in their evangelical order; (2.) universally; (3.) attentively, thoughtfully, so as to make their very meaning our own; (4.) exclusively. Other voices will sound in our ears. To none must a moment's heed be given; (5.) supremely and constantly.

IV. THE RESULT OF THAT OBEDIENCE.

Great shall be the prosperity you shall thus certainly secure. "Your peace," &c. The imagery is as instructive as it is beautiful. (See other outlines on this text.)

APPLICATION.—Assume the existence of religion in some degree. Seek to realise it in all its blessed fulness as here set forth. Wherever personal religion revives, zeal for the spread of religion revives also. Then efforts to do good will be better sustained, and the prospering blessing of God will be more richly given. The consequence will be numerical increase. (Note Delitzsch's translation of ver. 19.) *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 1849, pp. 913–934.

THE LOST IDEAL.

xlviii. 18. *O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! &c.*

Exile and home-coming, captivity and deliverance, judgment and mercy, these are the things of this chapter. In the immediate context there is an expression of the deepest regret on God's part that it had been necessary to bring on His people heavy judgments; while the text is a tender wish and longing that they had chosen the better way. Three thoughts are suggested for our instruction—

I. THE LOST IDEAL.

What might have been, and ought to have been. There had been an unattained national, and, therefore, individual possibility, which was now unattainable, at least to the extent that things could never be exactly as if they had attained it. So, too, there is to each man an ideal life as a matter of abstract possibility, not abstractly imaginable, but real and true as the life of God. The ideal life is *the* life. But what is it? There is a natural outline in every man's life. Sin depraves, but it does not obliterate the organic powers and the natural peculiarities and tendencies of the individual. There is an outline of what might have been left in each man. There are diversities, but the question is about each man's own ideal. What is it each of us has missed all these years—getting a glimpse of it now and again? The lost self is the self that must be found, or else happiness cannot be found. It is descried in some of our best states and elevated moods, or in quietness; and also in working earnestly towards some good practical object; or when, weary with all this world's wilfulness and folly, we can, notwithstanding, leave it all with Him who made and can rule the world: in these, and like exercises or states of mind, we can get some glimpses of the wonderful picture that stands clearly out in the Divine ideal, and from which it will never fade away.

II. THE DIVINE LAMENTATION OVER IT.

God continues to have a Divine preference concerning human life. What depths of love and compassion are in the words, "O that thou hadst hearkened," &c. Certain images are chosen because they are known to all the world: "Peace like a river;

righteousness like the waves of the sea." According to the Divine idea, a man's life should be deep, and wide, and clear, and voluminous, and refreshing, and fertilising, and progressive—like a river; and, like the waves of the sea, possessed of a righteousness that cannot be measured, and that can never end. God has not forgotten the ideal, which is ever-present to Him; and at sight of the actual, so unlike these grand images, Jehovah laments. Natural goodness, without the special help and grace of God, is, at best, a sorry sight to Him.

III. THE DIVINE PROPOSAL FOR RESTORATION.

Can the Divine lamentation be turned into Divine song and rejoicing? Are there any who are rising up from their fall? We know the answers to such questions, and how they touch the very core and substance of the Gospel (Eph. ii. 10; 2 Cor. v. 17; Phil. ii. 13). We are God's husbandmen; we are God's building (ver. 20). In the text God stands as with uplifted hands, pathetically lamenting over a great loss, a great disappointment, a great ruin; the *might have been* has not been realised. But what means the next word in the next verse, "Go ye forth of Babylon!" &c.; God will continue His work, He will restore the ruins of it, and carry it on to ultimate success. "Go ye forth of Babylon;" that means when interpreted, just begin where you are, do the nearest thing, forsake the sin that is strongest, rectify the wrong that is nearest, take the path that is open, make room in your heart for all that God will give you, and especially for the renewing Spirit. And in all this, look unto Jesus, and press towards Him as you look, and you are a new creature in Him; the ruin is restored, Eden blooms again, the dead is alive, the long-lost self is found.

"Have we not all, amid life's petty strife,
Some ideal of a noble life,
That once seemed possible? Did we not hear
The flutter of its wings, and feel it near?
And just within our reach it was; and yet
We lost it in this daily jar and fret;
And now live idly, in a vain regret.
But still our place is kept, and it will wait
Ready for us to fill it, soon or late.
No star is ever lost we once have seen;
We always may be what we might have been."

—Alexander Raleigh, D.D.: Christian World Pulpit, vol. xiv. pp. 269–371.

These words would be sad from the lips of man, but coming from God they are inexpressibly touching and solemn. They are the cry of a wounded heart. They tell not of the wrath of justice, but of the sorrows of love. There is, indeed, mystery, as there must be whenever we have to do with the Infinite, but that very mystery makes the lament the more affecting and impressive. In this pathetic verse there is a threefold lament:—

I. A LAMENT OVER LOST HOPES. Once there was hope and fair promise. God's beautiful ideal might be realised. But that is all gone. God only knows what has been lost. He is, so to speak, alone with His sorrow. Think of Aaron's grief for his sons (Lev. x. 3); of David's lament for Absalom (2 Sam. xviii. 33); of the tears of Jesus over Jerusalem (Luke xix. 41). In these we may see reflected the sorrows of disappointed love. How dreadful must be the cause that produces such effects (Ps. lxxxi. 13–16; Jer. xliv. 4)—

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these, It might have been."

II. A LAMENT OVER NEGLECTED OPPORTUNITIES. God is speaking here in the character of "the Redeemer—the Holy One of Israel." He recalls what He had done, and what might and ought to have been the happy results. But the precious opportunities had been abused. 1. *Gracious instruction*, "I am the Lord which teacheth thee to profit." 2. *Infallible guidance*, "Which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." 3. *Holy blessedness*, "Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." How beautiful are these emblems! Deep and tranquil as the Euphrates, the noblest of the rivers of

Asia, is the peace of the believer. Noble and majestic as the waves of the great sea, ever moving in harmony with law, and ever manifesting new forms of loveliness, is the righteousness of God's saints. All this, and more, might have been realised, if only God's commandments had been regarded. But the time is past. The glorious vision has faded away for ever. Neglected opportunities bring sure and terrible retribution. O man, consider thou hast been God's enemy. He has made thee gracious offers of peace. He has called thee to place thyself under the leadership of His Son, when all shall be well. And what has been the result? Reconciliation a failure. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. ii. 3; *cf.* 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15–17.)

III. A LAMENT OVER NEEDLESS RUIN. Sometimes evil comes in spite of us. It is a calamity, and not a crime. Borne aright, it turns to good. We see in it the chastisement of a loving Father, and learn to be content. But, alas! rarely can we hold ourselves blameless. If we suffer, it is because we have sinned. If we perish, it is our own fault. Reason, conscience, and the Holy Scriptures combine in testifying that man's ruin is not of chance or fate, far less of God, but exclusively of himself. The sinner feels, and must feel for ever, that if he had only hearkened to God's commandments, ruin would have been impossible. God's commandments *in the law* are all good. To keep them is life and blessedness. But we have sinned. Righteousness by the law is no more possible. God's commands *in the Gospel* are also good (1 Tim. i. 15; John vi. 29, iii. 16). When we consider who and what Jesus is, and how great things He has done for us, is it not the most reasonable thing in the world that we should love and trust Him? If we have not eyes to see His beauty, we are blind. If we have not the heart to commit ourselves to Him and to choose His service, as the most free and rightful and blessed of all services, it must be because we wilfully prefer evil to good, and the pleasures of sin for a season, to the love of God for ever (*cf.* Isa. v. 1–7; Ezek. xxxiii. 11; Prov. i. 24–33; Matt. xxiii. 37).—*W. Forsyth.*

When God smites men on account of sin, it gives Him no pleasure. The voice which speaks here is not that of the seraphic prophet, but the voice of the Lord God of the prophets. The manner is not merely the majestic formula, "Thus saith Jehovah," but it is supplemented with words intended to remind us of His graciousness and His goodwill (ver. 17). Nor is this the only lesson which lies on the surface of the text. Observe, the Lord addresses words of poignant regret over the *prize* the sinner has lost, as well as the *penalty* he has incurred. So did Jesus Christ look upon Jerusalem. Musing on the desolation to which she should shortly come, He reflected on the preservation in which she might have safely stood, &c. God looks upon the "peace" you might enjoy, and the "righteousness" that would enrich you, did you hearken to His commandments, and obey His great mandate, "Believe, and live." Sinner! the infinite heart of my Divine Master yearns over you.

What loss is that which God bewails on thy account? "Peace like a river," and "righteousness like the waves of the sea," are not within the limits of thy comprehension. There is a privation which you unconsciously suffer.

1. *You are a stranger to peace.* "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." There are two kinds of peace into the secret satisfaction of which no unconverted person can enter—peace with God, and peace in the heart. Yet both of these are the inalienable right of the believer; for the peace which our Lord Jesus Christ made by the blood of His cross has sealed his acceptance with the Father; and the peace which is produced in his conscience as the fruit of the Spirit, calms the troubled passions of

his breast. This is a peace which no man can attain unto except the man who hearkens to the commandment, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." But if you hearken to it, you shall have peace, and that peace shall be like a river. The metaphor is full of beauty, and not wanting in instructiveness either, by which peace is compared to a river. What does this mean? Several things. Peace like a river, for (1.) *continuance.* For ever, throughout all generations, the river speedeth to its destined place. Such is the peace of the Christian. He is always at peace. (2.) *Freshness.* The peace which a Christian has is always fresh, always receiving fresh supplies. (3.) A river *increases in breadth*, and its waters augment their volume. Such is the Christian's peace. It will go on increasing till it melts into the infinite peace of the beatific vision, where

> "Not a wave of trouble rolls
> Across the peaceful breast."

(4.) *Its joyful independence of man.* Habakkuk's song: "Although the fig-tree," &c. The devil cannot rob us of the peace which comes from God, neither can the world take it away. What would some of you give to have such a peace as this? Such peace you shall have if you hearken to God's commands.

2. *Thou hast not the righteousness which is "as the waves of the sea!"* Notice how this metaphor surpasses the previous one in dignity, if not in delicacy. We can all see a sort of comparison, and yet at the same time a strong contrast, between the water of an inland river and the collection of waters which make up the wide expanse of the sea. One, for the most part, is tranquil, the other always heaving and surging to and fro. So I suppose, as the words were originally addressed to the Jewish nation, and referred to their temporal welfare, the river would represent the beauty and happiness of their own land, like the garden of Eden, watered by the river of God's pleasure; and the sea, with its waves rolling in majestically one after another in unbroken succession, would set forth that progress which is the renown of righteousness. Generation after generation would witness the rising tide of prosperity. Oh! what did that rebellious seed of Jacob lose by forsaking the Lord! Apply this metaphor of the waves of the sea, like that of the flowing of the river, to the happiness of the believer. Look at this precious doctrine of the Gospel through the glass of that Old Testament symbol. The man who believes in Jesus Christ has the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, that is to say, the obedience of Christ is considered by God as his obedience. So, if I believe in Christ, I am as much beloved and as much accepted as if I had been perfect in a rectitude of my own; for the righteousness of Christ becomes mine. *But how is this righteousness like the waves of the sea?* It is like the waves of the sea (1.), for *multitude.* (2.) For *majesty.* What an illustration of overwhelming power! Who can withstand the power of Christ's righteousness? "Who shall lay anything to God's elect?" &c. Then it is majestic because it is profound, and because of its ceaseless energy. (3.) For *sufficiency.* (4.) For *origin.* That some of you have not got this righteousness is owing to this, that you have not hearkened to God. When the Gospel has been preached, have you listened attentively? &c. I know how some of you hear; it is always with procrastination. Even now, hear ye the voice of the Lord; —*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 609–610.

Disregard of God's Commandments.

xlviii. 18. *O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments, &c.*

There are moments of reflection on the past. What would have been the history of this island, if Cæsar had not invaded it? if the Stuart kings

had been inspired by different ideas? if the first Napoleon had not arisen? Similarly, we reflect on our own life. What would have been our career, if we had not, at some time, made such a mistake, or committed such a fault?—Thus also we think of some one whom we have known. With his talents and opportunities, what he might have become, if he had not spoiled everything by his folly or misconduct! Many a father laments over the son who has thrown away all his chances.

Thus God lamented over Israel. He had dealt with them as with sons; had bestowed upon them counsel and culture; but they had followed their own devices. And the consequences had overtaken them in diminished resources, a weakened empire, and eventual subjection to a foreign yoke. Had they hearkened to His commandments their state would have been different (vers. 18, 19).

There are multitudes over whom He is pouring this lamentation to-day. He has not left them without instruction and direction. He has given them His word, His commandments, His Gospel. He has surrounded them with gracious influences. But they have been regardless of Him and of His efforts to save them. They have indulged their natural disposition to sin. Confident of themselves, and heedless of warning, like children ignorant of themselves and of the world, they have fallen over the rocks into moral ruin.

There may be some here over whom He thus laments. As you look back on your "wasted lives," your "sins indulged while conscience slept, your vows and promises unkept," you see that He has good reasons to do so. We invite you to consider *what might have been, if you had hearkened to the calls of the Gospel and formed your life according to the Word of God;* what it might have been in contrast with what it is—

I. IN RELATION YOUR CHARACTER.

Disregard of God's commandments has led to many sins which need not have stained your life. One by one they have grown beyond all power of computation, as when debts grow until the position is irretrievable. After all allowances for the weaknesses of human nature, and the sins which would have been committed in spite of your endeavours, how many of them could have been prevented if you had hearkened to God's commandments!—Moreover, these sins and the habit of mind which led to them have exerted a deteriorating influence on your character. Every wilful sin weakens the power of conscience and lowers the moral tone, so that the more sins a man commits the more likely is it that he will commit sin. It is a gradual descent towards the lowest point of moral being (H. E. I. 1527, 1528, 4500, 4501). Multitudes have become so degraded in conscience that they are living lives, the future of which, if shown to them some years ago, would have shocked them and called forth the indignant protest of Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Contrast this with what might have been. The habit of obedience, associated with love to the commander and approbation of the command, exerts a gradually formative influence on the character. Good principles become more firmly rooted, the conscience is trained to a quicker perception of moral differences, the inclinations are more completely engaged on the side of goodness, the holy life becomes natural, the entire moral tone is elevated. Like a tree which was at first only a slip, but has grown (Ps. xcii. 12–14).

II. IN RELATION TO YOUR HAPPINESS.

All seek for happiness. Have you really found it in disregard of God's commands? Has not sin often involved you in trouble? Has it not left the stinging conscience? Are you not often conscious of dissatisfaction and disappointment with the world?—It might have been so different! You might have been enjoying "the peace of God." The troubles of life might

have been to you channels of superior consolation. The blessedness of a conscience at rest through the pardoning and renewing grace might have been yours. Your heart might have been at rest, fixed, settled, centred in God, instead of being storm-driven. You might have had the happiness of friendship and fellowship with God. Instead of the gloom of the future, the thought of which is unwelcome, your future might have been radiant with the glorious Christian hope.

III. IN RELATION TO INFLUENCE.

For all have influence over others. If you have not hitherto hearkened to God's commandments, your spirit and example has fallen on some one as an evil shadow. Within the circle of your influence, you have sown the seeds of evil and prevented good to an extent you can never calculate. You will never, at least in this world, know how many sins have been committed through you, and how many persons are morally worse than they would have been had they never known you. Some may have been irretrievably ruined. They have exceeded their exemplar.

Instead of this, had you been a Christian, consistent, earnest, your influence on these persons would have been quite different. It would have been a recognised and valued, as well as unconscious influence for good. Your own children. Not they alone. Some Christian work. The Church of Christ. The young. Society around you. You might have had the satisfaction of knowing that you had plucked some brand from the burning, and that you would be welcomed on the eternal shore by some who had passed through the golden gates because of your influence upon them. All this, and more, might have been if you had hearkened to God's commandments.

Would it not have been unspeakably better if you had? Better for God to give us His Gospel and require obedience, rather than leave us to ourselves. Better for the gardener to train the plant than leave it wild. Better that the elder brother remained at home and obeyed his father, than that he should have ruined himself, like the prodigal. Better that Manasseh, and David, and Peter had not stained their memories with sin, even though they repented. Can you recall any of your sins which would not have been better uncommitted?

But lamentation cannot undo the past. There it lies, and will lie for ever. But one thing can be done. You can repent; confess; forsake; sue for mercy through the Cross. God laments it, that He may attract your attention to this. Listen and turn. Let the young ponder His lamentation as a warning voice. Let your character, happiness, influence be what the Gospel secures.—*J. Rawlinson.*

It is one of the simplest and most impressive laws of the Divine government to render to every man according to his works. The operation of this law is strikingly illustrated in the history of God's dealings with the Israelites, to which reference is made in this chapter. But He has infinitely more pleasure in dispensing mercy than in executing judgment. When, through the impenitent obstinacy of the sinner, He arises to judgment, it is with reluctance and regret—a regret which finds expression in words of profound and tenderest pathos—"O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" Consider—

I. DISOBEDIENCE IN ITS HUMAN ASPECT.

1. *It involves a serious loss.* A man may lose a sum of money, and, by a simple process of arithmetic, be able to tell the exact amount. But there are losses which no figures can adequately report, or words describe; they are all the more keenly felt because of the reeling, bewildering sense of indefiniteness that surrounds them. More especially is this the case when we reflect upon the spiritual loss occasioned by a course of disobedience to the Divine commandments. We are conscious of a loss of something, though in what form, or to what extent, we cannot precisely say. Not only is there

the absence of what we once possessed —the soul having suffered eclipse by the dark, cold shadow of earthliness and sin resting upon it; but there is also the vague impression of what might have been! We never know what we lose by one single dereliction of duty.

2. *It involves a loss of profitable instruction.* This we infer from the preceding verse. There is a close connection between obedience and growth in sound and useful knowledge (H. E. I. 3153–3154). Who, then, can estimate the loss incurred by repeated disobedience? Lofty and expansive views of the character and works of God, views of Christian duty from the clearest standpoint, glimpses of the glorious possibilities of Christian enjoyment, the remodelling or the rejection of opinions that have led into grievous and fatal errors—all are for ever lost by a pertinacious refusal to hearken to the Divine commandments. Nor is this the worst. We have brought darkness into our minds, hardness and apathy into our hearts, fear and uncertainty into our prospects, and bitterness into our experience.

3. *It involves a loss of wise and infallible guidance.* This we also learn from the preceding verse. Who can estimate the misery occasioned by the loss of that guidance, and the consequent prostitution to base and ignoble purposes of the rarest talent, the wreck of innocence and virtue, of youth and beauty and power, the withering of fondly cherished hopes, the blighting of domestic and individual life?

4. *It involves a loss of personal happiness.* "Then had thy peace been as a river"—or *the* river—referring to the Euphrates, the largest and most important of all the rivers of Western Asia. To an Oriental mind this noble river would vividly represent the deep, clear, and abundant peace which flows in the heart of that man whose ways please the Lord. Peace with God is the only source of permanent happiness. Its possession is conditioned on the obedience of faith (Rom. v. 1, 2). What a loss, when peace is gone and happiness takes wing! (H. E. I. 2828).

5. *It involves a loss of character.* "Then had thy righteousness been as the waves of the sea." Character is a compound, of many separate elements —the outcome of many conflicting influences; but that which gives it lustre, dignity, and worth, is *righteousness.* As man lives in harmony with the laws of God, his righteousness is "as the waves of the sea." The waves of the sea are *attractive,* exhibiting in their ceaseless movements ten thousand forms of wondrous beauty; *imposing,* as they heap themselves in mountainous billows and march as with conscious majesty along the pathways of the mighty deep; *irresistible* in power. Most forcibly do they symbolise the beauty, majesty, and power of that character which is based in righteousness and moulded in harmony with the Divine commandments. There is something ineffably potent in the influence of a holy life (H.E.I. 1089–1095). It checks the froward, rebukes the obstinate, lures the penitent from the haunts of sin, and conducts to the way of righteousness. Every act of disobedience is a loss, not only to the individual, but to the whole community.

II. DISOBEDIENCE IN ITS DIVINE ASPECT.

1. *It calls forth the expression of Divine regret.* "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" What a cry is this!—the Deity lamenting the fate of those who have lost their all by disobedience to His commandments (see Luke xix. 41, 42).

2. *The expression of Divine regret becomes profoundly suggestive when we reflect that disobedience frustrates the Divine purpose regarding the happiness of the race.* The gracious purpose of God is to save man: His heart hungers for the love of redeemed humanity. Every act of disobedience insults the Divine love, spurns His mercy, and delays the work of emancipating and elevating the entire race.

3. *The expression of Divine regret becomes profoundly suggestive when we*

reflect that God only can aright estimate the present loss which disobedience entails.

4. *The expression of Divine regret becomes still more profoundly suggestive when we reflect that God only knows the terribleness of the misery to which the disobedient must be consigned.* The being God created to bless and exalt, He is obliged, in justification of His own righteousness, to punish (H. E. I. 2177, 2183); and the recollection of the Divine beneficence in the past will only augment the woe to which the soul is doomed for ever.

Do not think, O sinner! that your transgressions are unnoticed, or that you are the only one affected by them; they cannot be regarded with indifference by a just and beneficent God. And if you will persist in your disobedience, breaking through all restrictions, and spurning all help—if you will court ruin and voluntarily surrender yourself to the tormentor—He who has done all He consistently can to recall you to obedience, resolves you shall not perish unlamented; and as you drop into the abysmal depths of unutterable woe the voice of Infinite Pity exclaims, in tones which, though not intended to do so, can only sharpen the stings of remorse: "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea!"—*G. Barlow, in The Study and Pulpit* (1877), pp. 57–60.

"Godliness is profitable unto all things."

I. *God hath given us commandments.* 1. Authoritative. 2. Perspicuous in their style (Hab. ii. 2; Prov. viii. 8, 9; 2 Tim. iii. 15). 3. Universal in their application. 4. Reasonable in their claims.

II. *God's commandments deserve attention.* 1. They should be read. 2. Understood. 3. Remembered. 4. Practised.

III. *Attention to God's commandments produces the happiest results.* 1. The nature of that tranquillity which the people of God enjoy. 2. Its perpetuity (Isa. xxvi. 3, lxvi. 12). 3. Its increase. 4. "My righteousness," &c., may refer to the justice of the cause in which Israel was engaged; and had they hearkened to God's commandments, they would have borne down all opposition, like the waves of the sea, which no might nor power can withstand.

IV. *The people of Israel were inattentive to God's commandments.* They had not hearkened (2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16; Ps. lxxxi. 11). This conduct was—1. Ungrateful. 2. Rebellious. 3. Unnatural. 4. Ruinous.

Learn: 1. That attention to God's commandments is a highly important duty. 2. Where they are disregarded, peace is forfeited (Isa. xlviii. 22, lvii. 20). 3. That God most compassionately commiserates the circumstances of His creatures. 4. That man's final ruin is wholly of himself.—*Sketches of Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 299–303.

The River an Image of Peace.

xlviii. 18. *O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river.*

The images of this verse are images of national life; the peace, *i.e.*, the outward prosperity of the people, shall flow like a river; the righteousness of the united people shall be like the forceful, restless energy of the sea waves. There is a peace which is the fruit of Christian faith; and it is of peace in this regard that *we* are to see the image in the river. *What are the characteristics of Christian peace?* What answer to this question does the river afford us?

I. **The image sets before us a peace which is the expression of life and power.** The life of a full and flowing river is not like that of a shallow stream; we find in it neither suggestion of feebleness nor stagnation, as in the marshy pool. The latter is *still*—so still, it is ghastly. The Christian is called to peace, but he is called to life more

absolutely than to peace; the peace he is to realise is that, not of deathly calm, but of full, healthful life. The peace is as a river—not the babbling mountain stream; but the broad, deep, majestic river, that has gathered the shallow streams. The perfect restfulness of the broad flowing river is the outcome of power. Peace is fruitage of power—we can only reach peace by power. Faith must become firm and resolute. The great commandment cannot be fulfilled by irresolute will and feeble energy (Matt. xxii. 37, 38). "The peace of God"—why is that so perfect? Because in Him there is such perfectness of power, such force and fulness of character. There is a peace which comes by pardon that is very sweet (Matt. xi. 28; Luke vii. 50). But there is another peace, a peace which flows out of life's conduct—and that is the rest which is like the peace of the river (Matt. xi. 29). The rest of pardon is *given*—"I will give you rest;" the rest of obedience is *found*, "Ye shall find rest to your souls." Forgiveness is a word of welcome, yet is it also a call to duty. Through the Christ-like life we come to the Christ-like peace.

II. **The image of the text is expressive of healthful influence.** The river's life is one of ministry. Where the deep rivers flow, there are the rich valleys; "the still waters" make the "green pastures." The river does not live unto itself. The Christian's peace is not an idle reverie. We have not to seek peace, but life—a life of healthful influence, and we shall surely find peace. We cannot sever our peace from a life consecrated to service, if that peace is to be as a river (Phil. ii. 4; P. D. 2680).

III. **The image of the text is expressive of progress and perpetuity.** The river flows to the sea—finding no rest, nor seeking it in stagnant idleness, for it has a more perfect rest in its ceaseless progress. The Christian's peace is to progress—grow deeper, fuller with a progressive life. We are called to movement, the forward movement of the river. The progress of the river is perpetual. It is not a progress in spasms of energy. It would not have with such a movement a prevailing peace. Such energy is impulsive passion, fretful restlessness. This image of a Christian's peace is a far-off ideal; and yet, if Christian character has any fulness, Christian experience any depth, we should realise peace with an almost unbroken constancy; we should have beneath outward conflict inward calm (John xvi. 33, P. D. 2673).

IV. **The image of the text is expressive of pleasantness.** The peace of the flowing river is not dull and wearisome—it pervades a fresh, bright, and changeful movement. The Christian's peace is to be like the flowing, radiant waters of the river, not the still waters of a shadowed well. Peace and joy, joy and peace: these must flow together in Christian experience, bound together in a sacred wedlock. Rest in the Lord and be thankful, and your peace shall flow like a river (P. D. 2669).

CONCLUSION.—The peaceful life is dependent on obedience to God's commandments—"Hearken," &c. The Lord is saying to you, "Give me your heart, love Me, trust Me; be at peace with Me, and My peace shall be yours."

> "Rest, and hope, and glory,
> Are found at Jesus' feet."

Look into His face, hear His words, sit at His feet, abide in His love; do whatsoever He commands you, and your peace shall flow like a river.—*W. Steadman Davis: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 152–154.

How touching is the appeal of the Lord to His rebellious people! What a revelation does it give us at once of the ingratitude and folly of their disobedience, and of the greatness of His love! Consider now the first of the two figures under which the results of obedience to God's commands are set forth: "Then had thy peace been as a river."

"The Lord will bless His people

with peace." A blessing indeed! Without it there can be no real happiness. There is a peace which the world has to offer. But it cannot be trusted, it will not last. It is like the opiate which for a short while enables the sufferer to forget his pain, but for a short while only! It is like the tempting calm over the face of the sea, so smooth that only a ripple appears; but soon the calm will disappear, and the storm imperil the unwary mariner. Do you wish for true peace? See how God instructs you. "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! *Then* had thy peace been as a river." It is in obedience to God's commands, and especially to the great Gospel command, that peace can be found (John vi. 28, 29; Rom. xv. 13).

Observe the comparison made use of. Peace as a river.

1. We can imagine the broad and noble river winding its course down to the sea; but let us trace it up to its source. What shall we see there? Probably on a mountain-side a spring—the fountain—partly concealed from view. It might be passed without notice by many a traveller, and yet this is the origin of the wide river, with its deep, ever-flowing waters. Whence comes the river of the Christian's peace? Trace it up to its source, and what find we? The fountain ever open, ever fresh, of the Saviour's atoning blood! Here, and here alone, is peace to be found (H. E. I., 1321–1324).

2. Having found the source of the river on the mountain-side, we do not see at once what we find farther down—the deep, wide stream, with sure and ceaseless course hastening on towards the sea. No, we find the streamlet, with but little depth of water, gushing down with impetuous force and noise, ever meeting in its bed with stones and rocks which seem to try to arrest its progress, but in vain. They stay the current but for a moment, and then it bursts over and around them with strength increased by the interruption. By and by the stream runs more smoothly and steadily; the water becomes deeper; and though the obstacles in the bed of the river still exist, yet they are less noticed, and have less and less power to interrupt its course. There is less noise, but a more even, constant flow. Does not this aptly represent the experience of many a Christian?

3. The waters of the river become deeper and broader, because they are fed in many ways, and thus increase their volume. Other streams flow into it, and there is, too, the rain direct from heaven. These help to swell the river, and to give additional depth and force. So the Christian's peace needs a continually fresh supply, that it may deepen and widen, and be less interrupted in its course. It is continually fed by the direct outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and by the many and various means of grace. You who enjoy some measure of this peace, would you have it increased? Resort more constantly to the channels which Christ makes use of, for the impartation of His grace—the Word, communion with Christ by prayer in private and in public, and by the feast of His love; and be more watchful, and prayerful in hearkening to and obeying all God's commands. The more implicitly you obey, the more entirely the rebellious will is brought under and subdued, the more strongly and quietly will the river of your peace flow.

4. Where rivers flow, we find the country fruitful; but where water is not found, there is barrenness. Those Christians with whom the river of peace is flowing the most steadily and smoothly, will be found the most fruitful in good works to the praise and glory of God. It is far otherwise with those who are continually distracted with doubts and fears.

5. The noblest rivers become deeper, wider, stronger, until they enter the vast ocean. So the Christian's peace, received from Christ, and fed uninterruptedly by the Holy Spirit, at death expands into participation in the peace and joy which

are in the presence of the Lord for ever!

Would you know for yourselves this present peace, this future joy? Remember, you must first hearken—hearken *now*—to the commands of God, lest when the opportunity shall have passed beyond recall, God should say of thee, and thou shouldest seem to hear it, "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

"Oh for the peace that floweth like a river,
Making life's desert places bloom and smile;
Oh for the faith to grasp Heaven's bright 'for ever,'
Amid the shadows of earth's 'little while!'"

—*J. H. Holford, M.A.: A Memorial Volume of Sermons*, pp. 1–13.

The figure conveys three ideas:—

1. *Constancy.* A river is, in most cases, a permanent thing. Not like an occasional torrent which rushes down from the mountain to-day and disappears to-morrow, nor like a lake which the rains have formed, but which will dry up when the rains are over. A river flows on day after day, year after year, deeper at one time than another, and more rapid and wide, yet never exhausted, rolling on the same throughout all generations. So that peace of which this text speaks is a permanent, established thing. As long as the believer hearkens to God's commandments, it reigns over his soul, and keeps it, if not in an unbroken, yet in an abiding calm. Not that the state of his mind is always the same. Trace a river from its source to its mouth, and there is generally an almost endless variety in its course and appearance. It is now half hidden in a narrow channel among mountains and forests, and now spread over a wide bed, conspicuous in the plain; and then again, it is seen contracting and deepening itself and moving onwards with tenfold velocity and strength. The Christian's peace seems to vary as much. It sometimes nearly disappears; the man himself perhaps thinks it quite gone. But he is never wholly without it, while walking in the path of God's commandments, and never will be.

2. *Abundance.* The Christian's peace, it says, shall not enter his soul by drops, or flow through it as a scanty and shallow rivulet. There shall be a tide of peace, a wide and deep stream of it, passing into his soul. The waters shall be deep as well as broad (ch. xxvi. 3; Ps. cxix. 165; Phil. iv. 7). We cannot tell how peaceful God can make us. There is abundance of peace for us, for there is *God's own peace* for us! We often wish for the peace of this Christian friend, or the quiet of that Christian neighbour. But Christ says to us, "*My* peace I give unto you—a calmness like My own!" (P. D. 2666).

3. *Increase.* A river is not formed at once. At first it is generally a mere thread of water, scarcely perceptible through the grass and rushes among which it is running. But, as it flows on, other streams fall into it; it widens and deepens; the farther it flows the more enlarged it becomes, till it loses itself at last in the depths of the ocean. There is not much peace in the sinner's heart, when his attention is first fixed on God's commands; no, not even when he hopes he has found pardon in Christ for his transgressions of them. There is sometimes a good deal of joy at such seasons—it would be strange if there were not; but there is not what he himself, at a later period of his course, would call peace. True, solid peace is generally at first small; it is hardly perceptible amid the fears and perplexities with which the soul has to struggle; but as the soul goes on listening to the Divine commandments, applying to the Saviour for pardon and to the Comforter for strength, and gradually becoming moulded more and more into the Divine image, peace flows into it in a more copious stream, the sources of peace are multiplied, and the soul's capacity to receive and hold

it is increased. All this, unless God's ways are forsaken, goes on to the last. New springs of consolation burst open in every stage of our progress, old sources of comfort become richer and sweeter; our peace constantly flows deeper and deeper, till it ends in an ocean of peace, the boundless, fathomless ocean of everlasting joy.—*Charles Bradley: Practical Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 276–278.

It is from simple natural imagery that the mind is put into a fitting frame for catching the spirit of the text. The good and gracious God addresses this tender language of expostulation to those who have forgotten His laws.

I. Our heavenly Father is continually speaking to us by His Word, &c. Sometimes His voice is heard in thunder tones, as on the smoking top of Sinai. Sometimes its gracious accents are those of gentleness and love. It is the duty of all to "hearken," however and whenever God speaks. To "hearken" implies—

1. A reverent and careful attention to God's message. 2. That we consider God's commandments as binding upon us, and as pointing out certain particulars which we are required to attend to. God is a lawgiver, and the sceptre of dominion is held firmly in His grasp (Rev. xxii. 14).

II. The blessing promised, as the reward of such obedience, is peace—peace of mind and heart; peace with God through Christ Jesus. Peace may be compared to a river, 1. *In its origin:* small, joyous, sparkling, vigorous, rapid. 2. *In its progress:* widening and deepening; receiving new tributories on the right and left, from the various means of grace, as they are supplied with the dew of heaven and showers of blessings; sweeping away as it rolls on in its strength the obstacles of unsanctified affections and unconquered lusts. 3. *In its overflowing abundance.* It is not a scanty, fluctuating, failing stream, but a full tide of peace, both wide and deep, and supplying to the utmost every longing of the soul. 4. *In its perpetuity.* A river differs from a mountain torrent or summer brook in this: the river flows on with a comparatively steady current—sometimes broader and deeper than at others, it is true, but never exhausted, never dry—while the very existence of the brook and the torrent depends upon uncertain showers. The Christian who hearkens diligently to the laws of the Lord shall enjoy perpetual peace. It is not uniform, indeed, any more than the course of the river. 5. *In its increase.* Peace shall not only dwell perpetually with God's children, but it shall grow stronger and more pervading.

If you saw a man trying all his life to satisfy his thirst by holding an empty cup to his lips, you would smile at his folly or pity his ignorance. Not more deplorable folly and ignorance, however, than when immortal spirits persist in seeking peace *everywhere* except from its true and only source. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," and yet each one of those who will be condemned at the last day *might* have enjoyed "peace as a river."—*J. N. Norton: Sermons for the Christian Year.*

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1. Like a river in its *commencement*—trickling from some fissure in the heart, singing its own song as it drops from leaf to leaf, from ledge to ledge—now gathering itself up in a little pool, saying to its joyous waters, "Here we rest,"—anon rushing on again to fulfil its purpose, and gain its parent sea.

2. Like a river in its *progress*, ever widening and deepening, from the ankles to the knees, from the knees to the loins, from the loins to waters to swim in, a river that cannot be passed over, — receiving new tributaries on the right and left, sweeping away as it rolls on its healthful stream the dead and dying remains of past affections and former lusts, and bearing on its bosom a thousand newly launched hopes.

3. Like a river in its *influence*—holy, healthy, generating—causing

wide expanse of "living green" to spread out on either side — making even the desert of the soul "rejoice and blossom as the rose."

4. Like a river in its *termination*—rolling into and mingling with the shoreless, blessed sea of perfect peace, where undulating waves never roll in strife, or break in death, but where the people of God are "ever with the Lord."

Away among the Alleghanies there is a spring so small, that a single ox in a summer day could drain it dry. It steals its unobtrusive way among the hills, till it spreads out in the beautiful Ohio. Thence it stretches away a thousand miles, leaving on its banks, cities, villages, and cultivated farms, and bearing on its bosom more than half a thousand steamboats. Beautiful representation of a Christian's peace! Peace "as a river."

How little do we know of this peace of God! We deem ourselves happy if we have one serene hour out of the twenty-four; and if now and then there comes a Sabbath which is balm at morning, and sweetness through the still noon, and benediction at evening, we count it a rare and blessed experience.—*H. W. Beecher.*

I. *Their peace would have been like a river.* 1. It has a source. It begins at the fountain of Christ's blood. 2. It is fed from above. Rains and showers feed the rivers. The shower of grace swells the rivers of peace. 3. It has inundations, as the Nile. An awakening providence often makes an overflow. Afflictions and the consolations under them always, if the sufferings are the sufferings of Christ. Sacramental times also; hence the desirableness of frequency in the administration of the Lord's Supper. 4. It gets broader and broader to the sea. The Tay. (Prov. iv. 18.) Try yourselves by this test. 5. It is fertilising. It conveys nourishment. Egypt owes all its fertility to the Nile. The peace of Christ makes every grace grow. Holiness always grows out of a peaceful breast.

II. *Their righteousness would have been as the waves of the sea.* (α) Because—1. It covers over the highest sins. 2. It covers again and again. It is infinite righteousness. You cannot count the waves of the sea.

Inference. God wishes men to be saved. God sometimes pleads with men to be saved for His own pleasure: it would be pleasant to Him, it would make Him glad, as in the parable of the lost sheep. Sometimes He pleads for His own glory (Jer. xiii. 16; Mal. ii. 1). But here it is for the happiness of sinners themselves (so Ps. lxxxi. 13). Once more, He pleads with men, because unwilling that any should perish (2 Pet. iii. 9).—*R. M. M'Cheyne: Memoirs and Remains*, p. 467.

(α) The ideas suggested by the figure of a river are abundance, perpetuity, and freshness, to which the waves of the sea add those of vastness, depth, and continual succession.—*Alexander.*

The Right Use of the History of God's Dealings with His People.

xlviii. 20, 21. *Go forth from Babylon! Flee ye from the Chaldeans! With the voice of joy tell this, &c.*

Isaiah had prophesied that his fellow-countrymen would be led captive into Babylon; but he was able to look forward to the termination of their captivity, and could speak thus confidently because he knew—1, that God, who was about to consign them for a time, and for corrective purposes, into bondage, also purposed to deliver them therefrom; and 2, that every purpose which God has formed is certain to be accomplished. Assured of these facts, there rises before his prophetic vision two others:—1. He sees the gates of the prison-city thrown open; yea, the prison-city itself falling; and, standing

in spirit before them, he bids them flee from the peril involved in its destruction, into the freedom which the mighty change had once more rendered possible for them. "Go forth from Babylon! Flee ye from the Chaldeans!" 2. He sees the flight accomplished, the pilgrimage from the land of captivity completed safely, and his fellow-countrymen settled down peaceably in the good land promised to their fathers, and he exhorts them to proclaim to the whole world what God has done for them, "With the voice of joy," &c.

His exhortations are in themselves prophecies of what would happen to them, and the terms of those predictions as to what God would do for His people in the future were suggested by the history of what God had done for them in the past. Those prophecies must not be too literally interpreted; there is no record that God wrought any such miracles for His people during their march from Babylon homewards. What Isaiah wished to impress upon them was, that God would do everything necessary to perfect His deliverance of them, and to sustain them throughout it; and he did this in terms which reminded them how in all the trials through which their fathers had passed they had found God able to deliver them. How terrible was the difficulty to which he refers, and how marvellous the deliverance therefrom (Exod. xvii. 1–6; Num. xx. 1–11).

Isaiah was enabled thus to instruct and cheer them, *because he knew how to make a right use of the history of God's dealings with His people.* He remembered that that history is more than a history; that it is also a revelation and a prophecy—a revelation of what God will always be found to be; a prophecy of what He will always do for His people.

I. *The use that Isaiah made of that history, we also ought to make.* Two ways of reading the Bible—with a *literary* interest, with a *personal* interest. Geology—what it means to an earnest student; what it means to the intelligent owner of a vast estate. With like personal interests we should read the Bible, remembering that God is unchangeable, and that the laws on which He has made human welfare and happiness to depend are the same in every age. Reading the Bible thus, 1. we shall love it more and more, for the fullness of its treasures will become more and more clear to us (H. E. I. 613). 2. Fears suggested to us by the difficulties of the Christian pilgrimage, and that otherwise might greatly trouble us, will be driven away; for the history will convey to us the prophetic assurance that in every stage of our pilgrimage, and in every emergency that may arise therein, the grace of God will prove sufficient for us.

II. We are reminded also of *our duty in regard to our own experience of God's dealings with His people.* Isaiah here teaches that it would be the duty of redeemed "Jacob" to make known to the whole world what God had done for them. This is the duty of God's redeemed ones in every age; *collectively*, and hence the necessity of mission work of various kinds; *individually.* Let us not forget *this* (Ps. lxvi. 16). 1. Gratitude should move us to do this. 2. Compassion for our fellow-men should teach us to do this.

Heaven will be eternally the realm of song, because there the redeemed of the Lord will never grow weary of making known what He has done for them. "Go forth from Babylon! Flee ye from the Chaldeans! With the voice of joy tell this," &c.

Water from the Rock.

xlviii. 21, and Exodus xvii. 6.

Narrate the instructive fact recorded in Exodus xvii.

This wonderful fact suggests—

I. *That human life has its great emergencies.* Abraham, Jacob, David, Paul, &c. So with us. Christianity does

not exempt us from the sorest trials. Sooner or later, every Christian has his Rephidim in his way to Canaan. Secular misfortunes, family trials, personal spiritual conflicts, &c. Such emergencies are needful for the testing of our principles, and the maintenance and increase of our spiritual vigour.

"We need as much the cross we bear,
As air we breathe, or light we see:
It draws us to Thy side in prayer,
It binds us to our strength in Thee."

II. *That deliverance often comes from most unlikely and unexpected sources.* Water from a flinty rock. Redemption from the carpenter's son at Nazareth. The promulgation of the gospel by fishermen and tentmakers, and in modern times by Carey, the shoemaker; Williams and Thomas, the blacksmiths; and Moffat, the gardener, &c. (a)

Learn: To confide in God in the greatest emergency. He *can* help you, whatever it is—however dire. He has *promised* to support and deliver. Let your trust be determined, heroic, constant.—*Alfred Tucker.*

(a) "God can bring good to His people from the most unlikely sources. Nothing seemed more unlikely to yield water than the barren rock of Horeb. So God often brings refreshing streams of comfort to His people out of hard circumstances. Paul and Silas could sing in the dungeon, and their imprisonment was made the means of adding to their converts in Philippi. The lot of John in Patmos seemed hard and dreary indeed, but at the bidding of Christ, streams of living water gushed forth there, which refreshed the soul of the Apostle at the time, and have followed the Church until the present. Out of the sufferings of the martyrs came joy to themselves and blessings to their descendants. Above all, out of the hard circumstances of the crucified Lord of glory, God has brought forth waters of everlasting life."

I. THE SOURCE OF THE WATERS.

1. Its durability and unchangeableness. It was a rock, and one of peculiar solidity and strength. Time has not been able either to destroy or materially alter it. So the Rock of Ages (Heb. xiii. 8).

2. It was chosen by God Himself. So Jesus is a Saviour of His appointment.

3. It was opened according to Divine appointment by the hand of man. It was a smitten rock. So Jesus "gave His back to the smiters." And man gave the blow.

II. THE STREAM THAT FLOWED FROM THE ROCK.

1. It saved Israel from perishing. This was its chief use. And it saved them when nothing else could save them. So with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. It did more than save. Enabling them to wash away the defilement of the desert, it cleansed the Israelites. Sin pollutes while it destroys. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, because by it He obtained for His church the gift of the Holy Ghost.

3. It refreshed them. Their strength was so renewed that they rose up, and after fighting a whole day with the Amalekites, they overcame them, and passed on with fresh vigour to Canaan. In like manner the waters of life refresh the people of God.—*C. Bradley.*

This fact reminds us that Jehovah is the God of *providence*, working even miracles for the accomplishment of His purposes; while the great Apostle of the Gentiles directs us to Jehovah as the God of *grace*, when, pointing to it, he exclaims, "that rock was Christ." View the occurrence—

I. *As a seasonable, providential interposition.* 1. A period of great distress; myriads of men and women and much cattle without water. 2. An instance of the omnipotence of God—a flinty rock yields water at His command. 3. Encouragement to hope in God, though we see no prospect or way of supply.

II. *As an illustration of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1. The rock is an emblem of Christ, in solidity, strength, shelter, and duration. 2. The smiting of the rock prefigures Christ's sufferings. He was stricken, smitten of God, that He might bear our sins and carry our sorrows. The *body* of Christ was indeed smitten, His *soul* was made an offering for sin.

3. The waters that flowed from the smitten rock represent the benefits we derive from Christ's atoning sacrifice. How suitable was this supply, how abundant, how lasting! Let there be grateful remembrance of the smitten rock, vigorous prosecution of our journey; we drink to be refreshed and press on. Invite, and bring, our children and friends. Come sinner, thou!

"See from the Rock a fountain rise!
For you in healing streams it rolls;
Money ye need not bring, nor price,
Ye labouring, burdened, sin-sick souls

Nothing ye in exchange shall give,
Leave all you have and are behind;
Frankly the gift of God receive,
Pardon and peace in Jesus find."

—*John Hirst:*
The New Evangelist, p. 185.

THE POSSESSORS OF PEACE.

xlviii. 22. *There is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked.*

"There is a caveat put in against the wicked, that go on still in their trespasses. Let them not think they have any benefit amongst God's people, though in show and profession they herd themselves among them—let them not expect to come in shares. What have they to do with peace that are enemies to God? Their false prophets cried peace to them to whom it did not belong; but God tells them that there shall be no peace to the wicked."

Whatever the reason for its introduction here, this verse contains a most important truth which demands universal attention.

I. WHAT THE TEXT ASSERTS—that there is no peace to the wicked (H. E. I. 2296–2301).

1. *Who are the wicked?* (1.) Enemies of God (Ps. xxxvii. 20, lxxxvii. 15; Rom. i. 30; Jas. iv. 4). (2.) Enemies of the Cross of Christ (Phil. iii. 18). (3.) Evil-doers (Ps. xxviii. 3, xxxvi. 12, xxxvii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 14). (4.) Men of the world (Ps. xvii. 14). The wicked are "not only all who think and feel and do wrong, but all who have not the right spirit within them—supreme sympathy with the supremely good. There are degrees in wickedness as well as in goodness. All bad men are not equally bad. Sin has its blade, its ear, its full corn in the ear."

2. *The wicked have no true peace.* They may have the semblance, but even that is transient and vain (Job xx. 5; Luke xii. 20; Ecc. ii. 1, vii. 3). They have no real peace—

(1.) In the act of wickedness. There can be no happiness in sin—simply the gratification of bad passions.

(2.) In the business or pleasures of life. The world in none of its forms or modifications can afford solid, substantial, elevated peace. "Pleasures pall upon the sense;" riches take wings; disappointment comes, and the highest earthly and sensual pleasure leaves a sad sense of want—a feeling that there is *something* in the capacities and wants of the undying mind which has not been filled (H. E. I. 4969–4974).

(3.) Of conscience—no conviction that they are right. Indeed there is often the reverse of peace—care, distress, alarm, apprehension. "They and their consciences are ever and anon at drawn daggers; . . . their consciences are still galling and terrifying them for imprisoning their convictions" (Flavel). This world can furnish nothing which will give peace to the heart that is agitated with a sense of unforgiven sin (ch. lvii. 20; H. E. I. 1321–1324).

(4.) In death. There may be callousness, insensibility, freedom from alarm, but that is not peace, any more than sterility is fruitfulness, &c. Often, however, the mind is filled with alarm, and the death-bed is a scene of blank despair (H. E. I. 1567, 1568, 1590–1593; P. D. 684).

(5.) Beyond the grave. "A sinner can have no peace at the judgment bar of God—no peace in hell. In all the future world there is no place where he can find repose."

It is not man but GOD who says the wicked have no peace—God who made them, redeemed them, knows them; God who has no interest of His own to serve, who is "abundant in goodness and truth."

The urgent necessity of repentance and faith. "The quarrel sinners have commenced with God, if not taken up in time by repentance, will be an everlasting quarrel." Christ has procured peace. Realised by penitent faith in His all-meritorious atonement (Rom. v. 1, &c.) How earnestly should all who have not this peace seek it, since the world can neither give it nor take it away. It is necessary to the enjoyment of life (Ps. xxxiv. 12, 14, with 1 Pet. iii. 10 and 11).

II. WHAT THE TEXT IMPLIES—that the godly have peace.

1. *Who are the godly?* They are frequently described in the Sacred Word (*e.g.*, ch. l. 10). They fear the Lord, obey His commandments, and amid providential darkness they trust in Him.

2. *The godly have peace.* God's word everywhere declares it, and Christian experience uniformly confirms its statements.

(1.) They are justified by faith in Christ, and have peace with God (Rom. v. 1). Once at enmity with God, at war with the law and perfections of God, with all the truths of religion and with conscience; but now they are reconciled to God, and they acquiesce in all His claims.

(2.) They are Christ's disciples, and the peace which He has left He *gives*—He breathes it into their hearts (John xiv. 27; P. D. 2666–2669). Peace such as Jesus only can impart. Not such as worldly objects, pursuits, and pleasures give. Not such as systems of philosophy and false religion give. But such as meets and satisfies the soul's deepest needs, silences the alarms of conscience, abides amidst all the changing scenes and circumstances of human life, and in the hour of death and for ever.

(3.) They love God's law, and have *great* peace (Ps. cxix. 156). They have great calmness of mind. They are not troubled and anxious. They believe and feel (Rom. viii. 28). Great because divine, satisfying, abiding (P. D. 2673, 2677). Great because powerful: "It keeps the heart and mind." Great because incomprehensible. "It passeth all understanding."

(4.) They cultivate the devotional spirit in relation to "everything," and consequently have "the peace of God" (Phil. iv. 6, 7). How desirable in a world of anxiety and care to possess this peace—this rest from corroding care and distressing anxiety (Isa. xxvi. 3).—*Alfred Tucker.*

OUR SAVIOUR AND THE WORK OF OUR SALVATION.

xlix. 1–6. *Listen, O isles, unto me, &c.*

It is to the Gentiles, to *us*, that Christ here speaks concerning Himself and the work of salvation (ver. 1). What is the information to which He would have us "hearken?" This—

I. *For the work of redemption He was appointed and set apart by God* (ver. 1. *Cf.* Matt. i. 21). From the womb of eternity, before all worlds, He was called to this service. From this divine appointment comes His authority for its prosecution (Heb. v. 4).

II. *God had fitted and qualified Him for the service to which He had designed Him* (ver. 2. *Cf.* Rev. i. 16, xix. 15; Heb. iv. 12). (α)

III. *For the service to which He was preferred, God had reserved and protected Him* (ver. 2). "In the shadow of His hand hath He hid me, in His quiver hath He hid me," denotes—1. *Concealment.* The Gospel of Christ, and the calling in of the Gentiles by it, were long hidden in the counsels of God (Eph. iii. 5; Rom. xvi. 25). 2. *Protection.* The house of David

was the particular care of the Divine Providence, because that blessing was in it. Christ in His infancy was sheltered from the rage of Herod.

IV. *That God had Himself announced to Him His election and its ultimate result* (ver. 3).

V. *That when He shrank discouraged from the prosecution of His work, God had strengthened His heart* (vers. 4–6).

1. There came to the Redeemer a period of discouragement (ver. 4). This seems to point to the obstinacy of the Jews, among whom Christ went in person, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, laboured and spent His strength, and yet the rulers and the body of the nation rejected Him and His doctrine; so very few were brought in, when one would have thought that none should have stood out, that He might well say, "I have laboured," &c. His prophets had passed through the same trial (Isa. vi. 9; Jer. xx. 9). It is the complaint still of many a faithful minister. (1.) Let not ministers think it strange that they are slighted, when the Master Himself was. (2.) Every faithful minister passing through such a trial, may be sure of the sympathy of Christ (Heb. iv. 15, 16).

2. In this period of discouragement, He comforted Himself by remembering that it was the cause of God in which He was engaged, and the call of God that engaged Him in it, and that by God Himself His efforts would be judged (ver. 4, 5).

3. In that trying time He was comforted by a gracious communication made to Him by God Himself (ver. 6). If He seemed for a time to fail in the small work to which He was called, in a work much greater He should be successful.—*Matthew Henry, Commentary, in loco.*

(a) The sword and arrow were the chief weapons of the ancients, and were emblems of powerful and persuasive speech. The Tartars proclaim a powerful prince thus:—"His word shall be as a sword." Of Pericles it is said, "His powerful speech pierced the hearer's soul, and left deep behind in his bosom its keener point infixed." Such is the power of the Gospel.—*Thodey.*

The Sharp Sword.

xlix. 2. *And He hath made My mouth like a sharp sword.*

The prophet having, in the foregoing chapters, comforted the Church by promises of deliverance from captivity, goes on, in this and the following chapters, to comfort it with promises of its restoration by Christ, of which all outward deliverances were but as types. The text brings before us the furnishing of Christ for the work to which He is separated, together with God's protecting of Him in it. Christ's fitness for the work is set out metaphorically by a double resemblance. In considering the first part of it, let us inquire—

I. **What resemblance is there between Christ's mouth and a sword?** By Christ's mouth we are to understand here the words or doctrine of His mouth. It is frequent in Scripture for the mouth to be put for the doctrine or words of the mouth (Gen. xlv. 21; Lev. xxiv. 12; Numb. iii. 16). In the vision of Christ which the evangelist saw in Patmos, it is said, that "out of His mouth went a sharp sword" (so Rev. xix. 15); the word of God in the mouths of ministers is compared to a "two-edged sword" (Heb. iv. 12); much more is it so in the mouth of Christ.

1. *A sword is a killing weapon.* And the mouth of Christ has a killing power; by it is sin killed in the hearts of His people; by it is the head of pride cut off, and the heart-blood of unbelief let out; by it are all the noisome lusts which fight against the soul put to death (Hos. vi. 5; Isa. xi. 4). There is a twofold killing of men about which the sword of Christ's mouth is employed; the one is a killing of sin in them,—this killing is a making of the soul alive; the other is a killing

of them for sin,—to the wicked, it becomes a soul-destroying sword.

2. *A sword is a conquering weapon.* By the power of the sword did Alexander conquer the world. Christ did not use the material weapon; but "from conquering to conquer" He used, and uses, the sword of His mouth (Ps. cx. 2; 2 Cor. x. 4, 5; Rev. vi. 2). The sinner yields himself up when this sword reaches his conscience; it subdues him, and reveals to him Christ's right to exercise dominion, to dethrone usurpers, and to introduce men to the delights of His kingdom.

3. *A sword is a weapon of defence.* It is *offensive* to the enemy, *defensive* to him who has skill to manage it (Prov. vi. 22). (1.) In case of sin. By it is the soul preserved from falling into sin (Ps. xvii. 4). (2.) In case of temptation (Eph. vi. 17). As Christ did, so Christians may preserve themselves by the word of Christ's mouth (Matt. iv. 4, 7, 10).

II. In what respects does this sword differ from others? 1. *It reaches not only to the outward, but to the inward man.* No sword can prick the heart but the sword of Christ's mouth (Heb. iv. 12; Acts ii. 37).

2. *There is no defence against it.* There is hardly any harness but is sword-proof. What is said of the behemoth and the leviathan may be said of the unconverted hearts of men (Job xl. 18, xli. 24); and yet also, "He that made them can make His sword approach to them" (Job xl. 19).

3. *It is a healing as well as a wounding sword.* What the prophet says of God, "He hath smitten, and He will heal," may be said of the sword of Christ's mouth. When the 3000 were pricked in their hearts, nothing but the sword of Christ's mouth could cure them again.

4. *It can do execution on many at once.* It can as easily pierce a thousand as one man (John viii. 30; Acts ii. 37).

5. *It is never the worse for the using.* It contracts no rust, it never loses its edge (xl. 6–8).

6. It is *all edge* (Rev. ii. 12). His precepts have a sharpness to direct, inform, command the conscience; His promises are acute to revive, comfort, raise up; His threatenings are sharp to affright, terrify, cast down, and wound the guilty.

7. It has *no dross in it.* The purest metal is not without some coarse mixture; but this sword is all pure metal (Prov. viii. 8). A pure heart sees nothing but purity in the word of Christ (Prov. xxx. 5).

8. It is of *God's own framing.* God has made the sword of the word for Christ's mouth, and filled His mouth to manage it for our good.—*Ralph Robinson: Sermons*, pp. 429–436.

The Polished Shaft.

xlix. 2. *And He hath made me a polished shaft.*

The mouth of Jesus Christ is like a polished shaft. A shaft or arrow is a military weapon used to wound the enemy; formerly it was held in high esteem. As great victories have been obtained by the bow and shaft as by the sword. The old Latin and the Greek read a "choice shaft," and the word sometimes signifies chief or choice (Cant. v. 10). Others read a "bright shaft," which our translators have well rendered a "polished shaft." We find in Scripture the word of Christ's mouth compared to the shaft, as well as to the sword (Ps. xlv. 5); and Jesus Christ, as He manages the Gospel, is said to have a bow in His hand (Rev. vi. 2). Let us inquire—

I. Why is the word of Christ's mouth compared to a shaft? 1. *The shaft does execution at a farther distance than the sword.* When the enemy is fled from the reach of the sword, the shaft can follow him. There is no heart at such a distance from Christ but His word can easily reach it; though men be far off in place, or in state and condition, yet they are not

out of the command of the polished shaft (Eph. ii. 13).

2. *The arrow comes with greater force than the sword.* The word of Christ's mouth pierceth, like the shaft, into the very bowels of the soul (Heb. iv. 12).

3. *The shaft is not so discernible as the sword.* It goes so silently and swiftly to its mark, that it is often lodged in the heart before it is perceived. So with the word of Christ's mouth; the heart is pierced often before it is aware (John viii. 30).

4. *The arrow can enter where the sword cannot.* The shaft can screw itself in at the least hole (1 Kings xxii. 34). The word of Christ's mouth is compared to light (Ps. cxix. 105).

II. **Why is it called a polished shaft?** 1. *To show its fitness for the work for which it is designed.* A shaft that is untrimmed is unfit for service. When God calls His archers against Babylon, He commands them "to gather the shields and make bright the arrows." The mouth of Christ is always fit for holy service.

2. *To show the constancy with which it is used.* Things that are often used are bright and shining. Christ does not keep His arrows in their quiver, but makes daily use of them as the people stand in need.

3. *To show the glory of it.* The best refined gold is but dark compared with the word of glory (1 Tim. i. 11).

III. **In what respects does this shaft differ from others?** 1. *In the swiftness of its flight* (Ps. cxlvii. 15). We read of the immediate effects of the word of Christ (Matt. viii. 3; Mark x. 52). No sooner does Christ say to the soul, "Be enlightened, be quickened, be comforted," than the work is done.

2. *In the certainty of its execution.* This arrow never misses its mark. *E.g.*, the eunuch under the ministry of Philip; Christ and Zacchæus; the Philippian jailer; Saul, when Christ forced him to cry, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

CONCLUSION.—1. How dangerous it must be to oppose Jesus Christ! (Acts ix. 5). 2. Christ is able by His own power to defend His people against the strength and rage of all their enemies. He hath both sword and shaft which He can use for the defence of His Church.—*Ralph Robinson: Sermons*, pp. 436–442.

ON THE POSSIBILITY OF UNDERVALUING INFLUENCE. (α)

xlix. 4. *Then I said, I have laboured in vain, &c.*

Man will not only work, but he will sit in judgment upon the results of his labour. Accustomed to take the harvest-field as his rule of adjudication, he is not content merely to sow the seed and leave results with God; he must needs see an adequate return for the labour of his hands, else he will complain loudly and bitterly of misspent strength. This anxiety about results is not vicious in itself; it is, indeed, indicative of acute sensitiveness, and when properly controlled may keep a man from carelessness and stagnation. On the other hand, it may be abused and turned into an instrument of daily torture. The idea of a wasted life strikes horror into the reflective spirit. A man should truly be careful about this kind of thing—about the possibility of facing the King without any token that life has been well spent—about the possibility of having no proof that he ever lived, except that he is *dead! But some persons give themselves much unnecessary pain by underrating their real service in the world.* They mistakenly say—"I have," &c. It has been very common to rebuke persons who over-estimate their position and service, and very bitter contempt has most justly been poured upon those who have used the words of modesty without having felt its spirit—under-rating themselves to entrap society into the payment of compliments. Still, there are some who throw their spirits into great disquiet

by under-calculating their influence and falsely imagining that they have done little or no good in the world.

This question of good-doing is one of great subtlety. Quiet workers are apt to envy the man who lives before society in a great breadth of self-demonstration, and to under-rate themselves. There are mothers of large families who have no time to do what is generally known as church-work, who are shut up within the sanctuary of home to do work there which attracts no public attention, &c. Do you mean to say that you have spent your strength for nought and in vain? Far from it. Here is a young woman who for years has been afflicted; the day has been long and the night wearisome to her suffering flesh. When she hears of the doings of other people, the tear starts into her eye, and she says—"I have laboured in vain," &c. Nay! she passes harsh judgment upon herself, &c. The sister, too, is apt to under-rate her influence, and mistakenly to mourn over a mis-spent life. The same principle applies to different classes of spiritual labourers. It applies to the teacher in the day-school and to the teacher in the Sunday-school. It applies to preachers of the Gospel in a peculiar sense. If they are truly called of God, they thus pass false judgment upon their lives.

The text shows the true comfort of those who mourn the littleness and emptiness of their lives—"My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." The whole case is referred to Him who judgeth righteously. God knows our purposes, our opportunities, and our endeavours, and He will perfect that which concerneth us. The intention of the heart which it was impracticable to realise will be set down to our favour as if we had accomplished it all.

This subject is fraught with very delicate, yet most potent comfort; it is also fraught with warning and rebuke. This is the children's bread, and not a crumb of it must be given to dogs! Chief among those who must be warned of this comfort are the *idlers*—those who neglect themselves, neglect home, and neglect the church; and next to them must stand those who are conscious of doing much, yet who covet praise by depreciating their own labour.

The text must be reserved for hard-working, faithful people, who are not favoured with the immediate and visible results which gladden and strengthen some of their fellow-labourers. In the name of Him who did not lift up His voice, or cry in the streets, I would bid such people stand to their work till the bell strikes the ceasing hour. 1. Other men do not see the full result of their labour—they know not how many lamps are kindled by their torch. Did you ever hear of *Thomas Barber*? Probably not. His name is written but in pale ink on the world's scroll, yet that man was the means of converting Dr. Adam Clarke, one of the world's deepest scholars and most luminous expositors of the Divine Word. Did you ever hear of *Robert Burnard*? Probably not; yet that good man laid hold of a drunken mason's son in Plymouth workhouse, and watched over him with ever-helpful generosity, until that deaf pauper was known throughout the world as Dr. John Kitto. These are but two names out of a long roll. They show how even obscure names may be associated with stupendous results. Here is encouragement to continue all good work; "for as the rain cometh down," &c. 2. I say with reverence that the Almighty Himself often appears to be spending His strength for nought and in vain. To Israel He saith, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Again and again He uttered the voice of complaining: "The stork in the heavens," &c. We are, then, as merely human labourers, not alone in our apparent failure. "My beloved hath a vineyard," &c. This is apparent failure. Judge not the Divine worker by one thread of the immeasurable web which He is working, or by one

stone of the majestic fabric which He is building. He carries great breadths of work before Him, and by reason of its vastness, delicacy, and grandeur, time is required. There are many signs of failure, but they are temporary, not final. Why, then, art thou cast down? &c. If I be true to my work, I can fail only as God fails—if the Church be sincere, she can fail only as Christ fails—if the spirit be upright, it can fail only as the Holy Ghost fails.—*J. Parker, D.D.: Pulpit Analyst*, vol. i. pp. 661–670.

(a) For many fine words of encouragement for Christian workers, see my *Dictionary of Poetical Illustrations* (usually referred to as P. D.), 1006, 2011, 2013, 2181, 2182, 2443, 2645, 2767, 2851, 3205, 3278, 3491.

I. The most faithful labourers may be for a time unsuccessful. Not absolutely, but comparatively. If our Lord and Master had occasion to say that He had laboured in vain, &c., we should not be surprised that we have occasion to use the same language. Is the servant above his Lord? It may not be our fault. The opposition of Satan and wicked men may be of such a character as for a time to frustrate our plans, and prevent our success.

II. Faithful labourers will ultimately be crowned with abundant success. It has been so, and will be so to the extent desired, with the Saviour (ch. liii. 11). It will be so with His faithful workers. Not only can no true work done for God be in vain, but it will be rendered abundantly successful sooner or later. This e know from the promises of the sure word" (ch. lv. 10, 11; Ecc. xii. &c.; 1 Cor. xv. 58; Gal. vi. 9; Heb. . 10).

III. Faithful labourers should commit their work to God in the assurance that they and their work will be accepted. Not on the ground of success, but in proportion to their faithfulness and self-denial. Let us never doubt—

1. *God's approval of our work.* In all our labours, pursued with singleness of eye to His glory, we have His approving smile. He is not only acquainted with all we do, but He approves—takes pleasure in our services (Ps. cxlix. 4; Heb. vi. 10; xiii. 16; Rev. ii. 2). "I know thy works;" *i.e.*, I *approve* of them—the meanest as well as the mightiest; the cup of cold water alike with the most costly sacrifice, &c.

2. *God's ultimate and full reward of our work* (Gal. vi. 9; 1 Cor. xv. 58). It is not as if we were to die, and never live again. There will be a resurrection, and we shall be fully recompensed then. In view of this we should be "in labours more abundant" and self-denying (Rev. ii. 8–10). "I will give thee a crown of life"—an unfading, imperishable crown; life in its highest forms and manifestations; life eternal and ineffable, ever developing in all strength, and beauty, and joy, and perfection. This reward is *certain*, for He says "I *will*," whose authority is indisputable, whose power is supreme, whose faithfulness is unchallenged. He will accomplish His own Word.

CONCLUSION.—1. Let us not yield to discouragement, even though our work is comparatively unsuccessful. Jesus never did, and He is the model worker. Success is not the rule of action, but God's command to "go work in My vineyard." Press every energy into this service. Let no obstacles deter, no difficulties drive from the field.

> "Do all the good you can,
> In all the ways you can,
> To all the folk you can,
> At all the times you can,
> And as long as you can."
>
> —*Mrs. S. Glover.*

2. Notwithstanding all the labour and prayer expended, some of you have not been prevailed upon to "repent and believe the Gospel." "We then, as workers together with God, beseech you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (1 Cor. vi. 1, 2).—*Alfred Tucker.*

The Purpose of God's Great Gift.

xlix. 6. *And He said, It is a light thing, &c.*

The chapter refers to gospel days; and the meaning of the text in particular seems to be fixed by good old Simeon, who, when Jesus was presented to the Lord, hailed Him as God's "light," and His "salvation" (Luke ii. 28–32). We regard this passage, therefore, as an epitome of the scheme of redemption; and recognise in it God's gift to man, and His intention in that gift.

I. God's gift to mankind. "I will give thee," &c. As this gift is bestowed for moral purposes, the subject is calculated to lead our thoughts to the Giver, as our Supreme Lord and moral Governor. It shows in Him an infinite condescension to interest Himself about us, for, Isa. xl. 15. Two things here invite our notice—

1. *The person given* (Matt. xii. 15–18). His dignity (John i. 1; Zech. xiii. 7; Matt. xxvi. 31; John xiv. 10, 11; 1 John v. 7). Hence it follows that this is a great, an incomparable *gift*. He is God's "only-begotten Son," &c. (Rom. viii. 32). Yet this, great as it is, is a *free gift;* not conceded to the powerful, but granted to the impotent, the needy, the perishing; not conferred on the deserving as a reward of merit, but bestowed on the rebellious; not yielded to importunity, but given to "the evil and unthankful," unasked and undesired.

2. *The office or undertaking to which He is appointed.* This office of "servant" may be one of honour, but is always one of subordination (Phil. ii. 6–8).

II. God's intention respecting mankind.

1. "To raise up the tribes of Jacob," which are fallen from their religious honours and pre-eminence, and from national independence into dispersion and disgrace and contempt (Deut. xxviii. 37); and to restore "the preserved of Israel"—wherever scattered, or howsoever persecuted, still preserved from extermination, and still preserved a distinct people; to restore them to the favour of God, and to His spiritual service; and perhaps to their country and independence (Luke i. 69–75; Rom. xi. 26; Isa. xlix. 13–23; Jer. xxiii. 5–8).

2. But seeing that the Jews are but a small part of the whole family of man, their restoration "is a *light* thing," in comparison with the enlightenment of the Gentiles, and the salvation of the ends of the earth. The Gentile world was enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, error, and superstition, of misery, guilt, and condemnation (ver. 9; Luke i. 77–79, and iv. 18). To them Jesus was, by His doctrine, a *light*—concerning the *invisible world*, teaching the unity and perfections of God, &c.; concerning the *future* world; teaching the immortality of the soul, which even their wise men doubted, and a resurrection of the body, which they reckoned impossible. Besides this He may be considered as affording *light* on most important subjects, by His holy life, His vicarious death, &c. He enlightens still by His *Spirit*, &c. (2 Cor. iv. 6; Matt. v. 14–16; Phil. ii. 15). But further, He is *God's salvation*, and therefore, in all respects, a salvation suited to man's necessities. He finds us guilty, &c., and He saves us by bearing our punishment for us (1 Pet. ii. 24). He finds us enslaved, defiled, and unfit for heaven; and He saves us from thraldom and pollution by His Spirit working in us (Rom. viii. 2; Titus iii. 5; 2 Pet. i. 4). He finds all men, everywhere, poor and helpless, and He saves to the end of the earth, fully, freely, &c. (Heb. vii. 25; Rev. xxii. 17).

Improvement.—1. We ought very highly to value our souls: God does. If we lose them, we lose all. 2. We should accept the salvation which God has so kindly sent to us (Isa. lv. 1). 3. We should love Him who has manifested such love to us, and give proof of our love, by submitting to Him who submitted to shame, &c., in our stead

(John xiv. 15; 1 John v. 3). 4. We may confidently expect "all things necessary for life and godliness" (Rom. viii. 32, *et seq.*) 5. We should employ both our example and our influence to open the eyes of our fellow-men to behold God's light, and their hearts to receive His salvation (Isa lx. 1, lxii. 1).—*Zeta: Sketches of* 400 *Sermons*, vol. ii. p. 84–88.

Christ Our Light.

xlix. 6. *I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles.*

Not here only, but elsewhere, in many places, our Lord Jesus is held forth under the notion of a light. Show—

I. What kind of a light Jesus Christ is. There are several kinds of light. There is glow-worm light, &c. But there is one light that is far beyond them all, and that is *sun*-light, between which and the former there is no comparison; and that light Jesus Christ is—sun-light (Mal. iv. 2; Ps. lxxxiv. 11; Luke i. 78). Now sun-light hath these properties; it is—

1. *Glorious* light (1 Cor. xv. 41; Matt. xiii. 43, xvii. 2). And is not Jesus Christ of all others the most glorious? (Cant. v. 10; Col. i. 8). Let this advance your esteem of Him more and more.

2. *General* light. It shines everywhere (Ps. xix. 6). One sun serves all the world, &c. There is but one Christ, but that one is a universal Saviour to all the world (1 John ii. 2; Luke xvi. 15; Rom. x. 18; John xii. 36).

3. *Fountain*-light. What light the moon and the planets have, they derive it all from the sun. So Jesus Christ is the spring-head and fountain from whence every good and perfect gift comes. Gifts of *nature* do all flow from Him (John i. 2). So also gifts of *grace* (John i. 16; Heb. xii. 2). And therefore, in all our wants we must have recourse to Him; and in all our receivings we must give Him the praise.

4. *Free* light. It costs us nothing. What is more free than the light, and what is more free than grace? (John iv. 10; Rom. v. 15; Isa. lv. 1, 2; Rev. xxii. 17). Therefore ye are inexcusable, if you go without it.

5. *Enlightening* light. The sun hath not its light for itself, but for the world, and it communicates it accordingly. It rises every morning, and dispels the darkness of the night, and shines all day; and very sweet and useful it is. So Christ (Luke ii. 32; Rev. iii. 1). He opens blind eyes (Isa. xlii. 6, 7; Mal. iv. 2; Rev. iii. 18). Pray as the blind man that came to Christ for eyesight.

6. *Increasing* light. By degrees, as the sun gets up, mists, &c. vanish, and noonday comes. So it is with the souls that Christ enlightens (Prov. iv. 18; Isa. xxx. 26).

II. What inferences are to be drawn from this subject?

1. What a miserable condition is a sinful Christless condition! Those who are out of Christ are out of the light (2 Cor. iv. 6; John iii. 19, 20; Job xxiv. 13, and xxi. 14). But wherein lies the misery of a blind and dark condition? (1.) It is very *uncomfortable* (Ecc. xi. 7; Prov. ii. 10). (2.) It is very *unsafe*. Thou hast a journey to go, that will not be gone without light. There are many by-ways, &c. (John xii. 35.) Thou hast work to do that will not be done without light, nay, not without sun-light (Luke x. 42). (3.) It is miserable *here* (Eph. vi. 12; Isa. xlii. 7; Acts xxvi. 18). It will be miserable *hereafter*. Make the application to yourselves: Is not this my condition? (John ix. 25, 40).

2. What an unspeakable mercy then was the giving of Christ to save us *from* all this misery; to be a light to lighten the world! What a dungeon were the world without it! Therefore thank God for this unspeakable gift (Eph v. 8; Col. i. 12, 13).

3. Of what concernment it is to come to Christ to be enlightened by Him! Only by coming can we have the true light (Rev. iii. 18). Delay no longer; away quickly to the throne of grace, and beg for this eye-salve;—to the means of grace, and seek it there.

4. What is to be done by those on whom this light is risen? As Christ is the light of the world, so ye also are the light of the world (Matt. v. 14). Then (1.) let your light shine before men (Eph. v. 8; Rom. xii. 13; 1 Thess. v. 5–8) (2.) Let your light be increasing more and more—especially concerning the evil of sin, the weakness of self, the excellency of Christ, &c.—*Philip Henry: Christ All in All*, pp. 81–90.

Christ's Future Reign.

xlix. 7. *Thus saith the Lord, &c.*

In this and the subsequent verses we have a direct promise from Jehovah to the Messiah, of the ultimate success of His mediatorial work. Consider—

I. The description given of the Messiah.

1. *As despised, rejected, and contemned by men.* "Him whom man despiseth"—literally, whom the soul despiseth. It was a characteristic of Him that He was despised and rejected; and the prophet, in this verse, has given a summary of all that He has said respecting Him in chap. liii. (John i. 10, 11). "Despised by the mere animal passion of man, which judges according to the outward appearance; and is therefore carnal, and not spiritual."—*Wordsworth.*

2. *As abhorred by the Jewish nation.* "Him whom the nation abhorreth" (*cf.* chap. i. 4, x. 6). He was regarded as an abomination by the people (Luke xv. 2). "This man"—this *fellow*—"receiveth sinners"—is in secret sympathy with them. In Matt. xxvi. 67; Luke xxiii. 18–26, ch. liii. 3, 4 is literally fulfilled. He is still abhorred by the Jews. His name excites the utmost contempt among them, and they turn from Him and His claims with the deepest abhorrence. They contemptuously call Jesus *Tolvi*, the crucified; and nothing excites deeper abhorrence and contempt than the doctrine of salvation by the merits of the crucified Nazarene (1 Cor. i. 23, and others).

3. *As "a servant of rulers."* Though He was ruler of all worlds, He voluntarily submitted Himself to human power, and yielded obedience to human rulers—the constituted authorities of His day. He conformed to the institutions of His country (Matt. xvii. 27, xxvi. 52, 53). He submitted to an unjust trial and verdict. In the strictest sense He was "a servant of rulers," for "He was deprived of His liberty, comfort, and life at their caprice."

II. The purpose of God respecting the Messiah's reign.

1. *He is "chosen of God" to accomplish the world's salvation.* "He shall choose thee." He was elected to diffuse light and truth among all nations (ver. 6; also chap. xlii. 1–10).

2. *All shall bow to His sceptre.* "Kings shall see," &c. That is, kings shall see the fulfilment of the Divine promise by which He is destined to be the light of the nations, and they shall rise up with demonstrations of respect and reverence; they shall render Him honour as their Teacher and Redeemer. They shall do homage to the great King-Saviour. "Kings, being usually seated in the presence of others, are described as rising from their thrones; while princes and nobles, who usually stand in the presence of their sovereigns, are described as falling prostrate"—(*Hitzig*). The universality of His reign is distinctly foretold (Ps. ii. 6, 8; Isa. xlii. 1, 4; Zec. xiv. 19; Rev. xix. 6, 11–17;

and others). The text has been fulfilled. Kings and princes have bowed before the Redeemer, and the time is hastening on when throughout the world they shall adore Him.

3. *God in His faithfulness will accomplish His gracious purpose.* "Because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel." His purpose shall assuredly be brought to pass. For this He pledges the veracity of His word. The universality of Christ's reign shall be traced entirely to the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God.

CONCLUSION.—1. *What a glorious period is approaching!* All the world shall see the salvation of God. He who is now despised and rejected by so many, shall be universally honoured, loved, adored. All shall bow to Him, as the ripe fields of autumn do to the winds of heaven. The day of His triumph draws nigh —all things betoken it! Glorious prospect! (H. E. I. 979, 1161, 1162; P. D. 475).

2. *What encouragement have all Christian workers*—Ministers, missionaries, &c. The success of our efforts is certain. What honour is conferred upon us as the instruments of diffusing light and truth! Christ deemed it the highest honour, so should we. Let us with all possible earnestness seek the advancement of His reign, and the increase of its glory. They who do most for the conversion of the world, are most like Christ, and will have the greatest reward in heaven.

3. *What is your relation to this great King-Saviour?* Is God's gracious purpose accomplished in your salvation? Does He reign in your heart? Do you despise and reject the crucified Jesus, or do you receive Him as your prophet, priest, and king? It is of infinite importance that you belong to His kingdom. Without this, there can be no real holiness, happiness, security. Hostility to Christ, the Divinely appointed Saviour-King is utterly useless. He must and will be victorious (Ps. ii 4 and 5, and others). How fearful will be the condition of all who refuse allegiance to Him! Let Him become without delay your Saviour and your King (Ps. ii. 11, 12).

"O Thou Almighty Lord,
My Conqueror and my King,
Thy sceptre and Thy sword,
Thy reign of grace, I sing;
Thine is the power: behold, I sit
In willing bonds before Thy feet."
—*Dr. Watts.*

—*Alfred Tucker.*

THE SUFFERING REDEEMER THE SOURCE AND DISPENSER OF BLESSING TO HIS PEOPLE.

xlix. 7–12. *Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer, &c.*

I. THE HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION OF THE MESSIAH (ver. 7). He who had always taken care of the Jewish church, and wrought out for it those deliverances that were typical of the great salvation, here speaks to Him who was the Undertaker of that salvation.

1. *He takes notice of His humiliation* (ver. 7). "Whom man despiseth," &c. (*cf.* ch. liii. 3; Luke xxiii. 21). "A servant of rulers." Pilate boasted of his power over Him (John xix. 10).

2. *He promises Him exaltation.* Honour was done Him, even in the days of His humiliation. Noblemen, rulers, centurions came and kneeled to Him; but this was more fully accomplished when kings received His Gospel, submitted to His yoke, joined in His worship, and called themselves His vassals. Not that Christ values the rich more than the poor (they stand on a level with Him), but it is for the honour of His kingdom among men, when the great ones of the earth appear for Him, and do homage to Him.

II. THE SUCCOUR AND SUCCESS PROMISED HIM.

1. *The succour.* God will hear His cry for help (ver. 8; Heb. v. 7) In

the days of His flesh Christ knew that His Father heard Him always (John xi. 42, xvii. 24). He will also help Him to go through with His undertaking. The Father was always at His right hand, and did not leave Him when His disciples did (John xvi. 32).

2. *The success.* He is assured (1.) that He should be the Guarantee of the treaty of peace between God and man: "I will give Thee for a covenant of the people" (see pp. 113–115).

(2.) By Him the decays of the Church should be repaired, and the Church itself established on a "rock" (ver. 8). "Establish the earth," or rather, "the land," the land of Judah, a type of the Church.

(3.) To Him should be gathered those who were farthest from God and the good land He had promised to His people (ver. 12). The Jews were dispersed into several parts of the country of Babylon, as enemies pleased, to prevent any combination among them. But when God's time is come to bring them home together, one spirit shall animate all them that lie at the greatest distance from each other; and those also that had taken shelter in other countries shall meet them in the land of Judah. This promise was to have a further accomplishment in the great confluence of converts to the Gospel-church, and its full accomplishment when God's chosen shall come from the east and the west, to sit down with the patriarchs in the kingdom of God (Matt. viii. 11).

III. THE BLESSINGS IN STORE FOR ALL THOSE TO WHOM HE IS MADE SALVATION. It was by the foresight of these that He was encouraged to prosecute the great and costly work He had undertaken. He is assured—

1. *That by Him the souls of men should be freed from the bondage of guilt, and brought into the glorious liberty of God's children* (ver. 9).

2. *That He should be enabled to provide for the comfortable passage of those whom He set at liberty to the place of their rest and happy settlement* (ver. 9–11). These verses refer to the provision made for the Jews' return out of their captivity, who were taken under the particular care of Divine providence; but it is applicable to that guidance of Divine Grace which all God's spiritual Israel are under, from their release out of bondage to their settlement in the heavenly Canaan.

(1.) They shall have their charges borne and shall be fed at free cost with food convenient. "They shall feed," &c. Now, as formerly, God leads Joseph like a flock. When God pleases, even highway ground shall be good ground for His sheep to feed in. Their pastures shall be not only in the valleys, but "in all high places," which are commonly dry and barren. Wherever God brings His people, He will take care they shall want nothing that is good for them (Ps. xxxiv. 10). So well shall they be provided for, that "they shall not hunger nor thirst;" for what they need they shall have seasonably, before their need of it comes to any extremity.

(2.) They shall be sheltered and protected from everything that would incommode them. "Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them," for God causes "His flock to rest at noon" (Cant. i. 7). No evil thing shall befall those who put themselves under Divine protection; they shall be enabled to bear "the burden and heat of the day."

(3.) They shall be under God's gracious guidance (ver. 10). He will lead them, as He did His people in the old time through the wilderness. The world leads its followers by broken cisterns, or brooks that fail in summer; but God leads those that are His "by the springs of water." He will furnish them with suitable and seasonable comforts.

(4.) Those whom God guides shall find a ready road and all obstacles removed (ver. 11). He that in times past made the sea a way, now with as much ease will make the mountains a way, though they seem impassable. The causeway shall be raised, to make it both the plainer and the fairer. The

ways in which God leads His people, He Himself will be the overseer of, and will take care that they be kept in good repair, as of old the ways that led to the cities of refuge. Though there be difficulties in the way to heaven, which we cannot by our own strength get over, yet the grace of God will be sufficient to help us over them, and to make even the "mountains a way."—*Matthew Henry: Commentary, in loco.*

CHRIST DESPISED AND HONOURED.

xlix. 7. *Thus saith the* LORD, . . . *to him whom man despiseth, &c.*

This verse has been called "a prelude of chap. liii." It anticipates that minute and graphic exhibition of the Messiah's sufferings and glories, which we have so often pondered, and prize so highly. In brief compass it states the leading points presented in that chapter. This is the twig which is there expanded into a magnificent tree. Here, as there, the prophet transports himself into the time when our Lord lived and suffered on earth, and stands at the point of transition between the humiliation and the exaltation. The shame, the indignities, the rejection, the cruel sufferings are stated as present facts: the glory, the honour, the worship, the world-wide influence are viewed as future. When Jesus died upon the cross, and His body was consigned to Joseph's tomb, His degradation seemed complete, His cause hopeless. His persecutors never dreamt that He would ever be heard of again, and even the faith of His disciples was shaken (Luke xxiv. 21). Never were surmises more signally falsified; never were fears and doubts more effectually relieved than when the Redeemer rose on the third day, and, after showing Himself to His disciples, ascended to the seat of honour and power. From this time onward His career is an entire reversal of the circumstances connected with His previous earthly course.

I. **View the prophecy in its historical fulfilment.** "The sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" form the great theme of Old Testament prediction, and in this one verse, which contains the substance of chap. liii., both the sufferings and the subsequent glory are clearly foretold.

1. Look at *the features of His humiliation.* The Messiah is spoken of as one "whom man despiseth (or of contemptible soul), whom the nation abhorreth, a servant of rulers." In these successive clauses the number of Christ's enemies is narrowed from men to the Jewish people, and from the Jews to their rulers; but the feelings of hostility and the active opposition became more intense, passing from contempt to abhorrence, and from abhorrence to the infliction of cruel sufferings and abject degradation, culminating in the death of a slave. In Him men saw nothing to attract their admiration,—none of that earthly greatness and outward display which captivate the mob. His meekness and holiness repelled them, and His lowly station rendered Him an object of contempt (liii. 2, 3). By the Jews he was regarded with abhorrence. He did not answer to their carnal notions, He shocked their prejudices: they reasoned from His sufferings and mean condition to His character, inferring that for some sin He was the object of the Divine displeasure, not knowing that the sin was their own. In fanatical zeal their rulers condemned Him to die a shameful death. Thus was He rejected by all classes. His cross was an offence. His mission, character, and work were strangely misunderstood. The ignorance and blindness of His adversaries explain their treatment of Him (Acts iii. 17; 1 Cor. ii. 8). The power and passions of the world were arrayed against Him.

2. *His subsequent honours and influence.* Behold how changed is the estimate formed of Him! Even kings rise from their thrones to pay Him

homage, and princes worship Him, implying that if those of highest rank acknowledge His claims and bow before His throne, those of meaner position will likewise do so. Already we can witness the fulfilment in part of this prophecy, but more remains (Ps. lxxii. 11). The King of kings and Lord of lords has won the love and allegiance of all ranks, and sovereigns have given Him their personal service and the homage of their hearts. Crowned heads have appeared in the meetings of the Evangelical Alliance, and shown a deep interest in its proceedings. The Redeemer has won His conquests from all classes; all ranks grace His triumph. "The servant of rulers" has become their Master.

3. *The explanation of this surprising change in men's attitude towards Christ.* All hinges on the word "see." That is the secret of the transition. Men are brought to see the truth in reference to Christ's person, character, and work. The veil is removed from their heart (2 Cor. iii. 14–16). They see the glory of the cross, the love and justice displayed in redemption. The Godhead of Christ, the surpassing beauty of His character, and the necessity and efficacy of His sacrifice flash upon their minds, and revolutionise their views and feelings. The real cause of their hostility was that they would not "come and see." Honest inquiry removes every stumblingblock in the way of faith. The lowliness of the suffering Saviour would become His strongest attraction, for to this He condescended in His love for the guilty (2 Cor. viii. 9).

4. *The result of this transition.* "Because of, or for the sake of the Lord, who is faithful." It manifests the Father's faithfulness to His Son in crowning Him with the promised reward of His work (liii. 10–12), and to mankind in accomplishing the long-foretold redemption. When "every knee shall bow to Christ," it will redound "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 11).

II. **View the prophecy as a description of our own spiritual history.** Once, it may be, we were indifferent to Christ and despised Him in our hearts, evading the very thought of Him. But now we have tasted and *seen* that the Lord is gracious. God has shown us the madness of despising His Son (Gal. i. 15, 16). Our experience resembles that of the Jewish converts as expressed in chap. liii. 2–6. They who hid their faces in shame at the sight of the Messiah now own Him as their Saviour. There is nothing in Him to draw the carnal eye. The sensual mind has no appreciation of His excellence; the self-deluded and impenitent can dispense with His sacrifice; the sin-loving soul is repelled by His holiness; the ignorant and indifferent disregard Him. If the unbeliever studies Christ at all, he is forced to maintain that He is not the Son of God, and that His death was the merited punishment of His claim to be the Son of God. But he whose eyes have been opened is entranced by the vision of His divine glory and self-sacrificing love (Eph. v. 8; John ix. 25; 2 Cor. v. 17). Would that all of us could see the glory of the cross, the true character and dignity of the Redeemer! As preachers we do all in our power to draw aside the veil of ignorance and prejudice, that the glories of Christ might break upon the benighted soul. What think ye of Christ, then? Do you despise Him, or do you worship Him?—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

The Faithfulness of God.

xlix. 7. *The Lord that is faithful.*

This verse contains a promise of the future honour that should await the Redeemer, and of the success which should crown His work. Because Jehovah is faithful in the fulfilment of His promises, He will assuredly bring this to pass, and the fact that the Messiah shall be thus honoured shall

be traced entirely to the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God.

I. THE NATURE, CHARACTERISTICS, AND MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS.

1. *What is faithfulness in relation to God?* It is that absolute perfection of the Deity by which He is true in Himself, and by which it is impossible for Him not to fulfil whatever He has promised, or not to bring to pass whatever He has purposed. "It is the attribute that pledges to man in infinite condescension—for it is the most anthropopathic of all His attributes—the fulfilment of every specific promise based upon the economy of His righteousness" (*Dr. Pope*). It is necessarily implied in His holiness. Testimonies of Scripture at once explain and prove this view of Divine truth, and place this topic in a clear and convincing light (Numb. xxiii. 19; Ps. xxxvi. 5, 6; 1 Cor. i. 9, x. 13; 1 Thess. v. 24; 2 Thess. iii. 2; Heb. vi. 16–18, x. 23; Titus i. 2; 1 John i. 9).

2. *What are the distinguishing characteristics of the Divine faithfulness?* It is declared to be—*Established* (Ps. lxxxix. 5). *Unfailing* (Ps. lxxxix. 33; 2 Tim. ii. 13). *Great* (Lam. iii. 23). *Incomparable* (Ps. lxxxix. 8). *Infinite* (Ps. xxxvi. 5). *Everlasting* (Ps. cxix. 90, cxlvi. 6).

3. *How is the Divine faithfulness manifested?*

(1.) In the triumphs of Christianity in the world. See text and context, with records in "The Acts of the Apostles." Modern triumphs of the Gospel at home and abroad.

(2.) In forgiving sin. Sinners repenting of their sin, and confessing it, are assured that God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John i. 9).

(3.) In the preservation and establishment of believers. Believers oppressed by the weariness of the way, and their own instability, are reminded that "the Lord is faithful," &c. (2 Thess. iii. 3).

(4.) In the entire sanctification of believers. The saints, encouraged to aspire to perfect holiness of body, and soul, and spirit, are assured that faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it (1 Thess. v. 24).

(5.) In the relations which He sustains. As a King, Friend, Father, &c.

(6.) In the afflictions of the godly (Ps. cxix. 75).

(7.) In the fulfilment of His promises. However apparently improbable (1 Kings viii. 20; Ps. cxi. 5, cxxxii. 11; Mic. vii. 20; Heb. x. 23). "There is not a promise which God has made but what either He has kept it, or else, being dated for the future, He will keep it when the time appointed comes." "If God were to forget His engagements, He would cease to be God."

These passages carry the Divine fidelity into the entire process of personal salvation from beginning to end.

II. THE LESSONS WHICH THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS SHOULD TEACH US.

1. *How it ought to warn the wicked!* It is remarkable that this attribute is never expressly connected with the Divine threatenings, though equally applicable to it. God will inflict the punishment which He has denounced against sin (H. E. I., 2180–2184, 2296–2299, 4603–4610).

2. *How it ought to encourage the penitent!* The promises of forgiveness and grace are to be relied on with the utmost possible confidence.

3. *How it ought to promote the abiding graces of the Christian life!* Increase and strengthen our *faith*. Why mistrust Him? (α) Raise and animate our *hope* (Ps. xxxix. 7, cxlvi. 5; Jer. xvii. 1). Augment and intensify our *love*.

4. *How it should encourage pleading prayer!* (Ps. cxliii. 1). "We should turn God's promises into prayers, and He will turn His promises into performances, for with God saying and doing are not two things, as they often are with men. God will do as He hath said"—(*Henry*). "Thou hast said"—a mighty plea in prayer.

5. *How it should incite us to bear our personal testimony!* Every trusting soul can say, like Joshua (Josh. xxi. 45). This testimony we should bear (Ps. xl. 10, lxxxix. 1).

6. *How it should teach us to cultivate faithfulness in all its forms and degrees!* (1). To God. "Be ye followers"—imitators—"of God as dear children." Faithful as servants, &c. Faithful to His word—in holding it, and in seeking to spread it. (2.) *To our fellow-men.* "The fruit of the Spirit is faith"—fidelity (Gal. v. 22). True religion makes a man faithful—as a neighbour, friend, father, husband, son. He is faithful to his fellow-men. All pretensions of being the subject of the renewing influence of the Spirit, when such fidelity does not exist, are deceitful and vain.—*Alfred Tucker.*

(α) "What makes you think that God will never forsake them that trust in Him?" was asked of an aged Christian. "Because He has promised," was the reply. "And what makes you think that He will keep His word? "Because He never yet broke it." Here is encouragement for us all! Here is cause to cry aloud,—"Though He slay me," &c. The past declares God's faithfulness, the present confirms it, and the future will only make more clear His fidelity and truth.

The World Given to Christ.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

xlix. 8–13. *Thus saith the Lord, &c.*

The prophet was looking forward, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the Messiah and His times, and here states several important truths respecting His great mission.

Customary for some kings to grant to favoured ones whatever they requested. God says to His kingly Son, "Ask of Me, and I shall give," &c. (Ps. ii. 8). Here He is represented as having asked, and this is the answer, and the assurance that JEHOVAH would in His own good time make Him the means of salvation to all mankind. Consider—

I. THE PROMISED UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION OF THE GOSPEL.

1. It was commenced in the apostolic age. "The word of the Lord grew and mightily prevailed" over the various forms of error, superstition, idolatry, &c.

2. It has been continuing through the ages to the present hour. Rapidly and extensively during the present century. (α)

3. It will be fully accomplished in "the fulness of time." Innumerable triumphs have already been gained over sin and Satan, and the gospel will go forth conquering and to conquer. The most distant nations shall submit to Christ (ver. 12; Matt. viii. 11; H. E. I. 979, 1161–1168). (β)

What reasons have we for believing this? We have—

(1.) The faithful and unerring promises of JEHOVAH (Ps. ii. 8, xxii. 27, lxxii. 17; Isa. xl. 5, xliv. 2 &c.) Believe these promises. Labour and pray for their accomplishment. Especially pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to render all the means which are employed effectual. Ponder them as a source of continual encouragement.

(2.) The adaptation of Christianity, above all other forms of religion, to be universal. (γ)

(3.) The present aspect of the world furnishes much reason to hope that the accomplishment of this promise is drawing nigh. The whole world is practically open to the missionaries of the Cross. The progress of various forms of improvement throughout the civilised world—facilities for intercourse between the nations—extension of commerce—numerous translations of the Bible. The progress of public sentiment in regard to the conversion of the world. The probable prevalence of the English language, &c.

II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO SHALL EMBRACE IT (ver. 9, 10). The figure is taken from the shepherd leading home his flock, &c. "It is a most beautiful image of the tender care of the Great Shepherd of His people in a world like this—a world, in its main features, in regard to real comforts, not unaptly compared to

barren hills, and pathless, burning sands."

The promise includes—1. Abundant provisions. 2. Careful protection. 3. Unerring guidance (see p. 336).

III. THE EXULTANT PRAISE WHICH SUCH GLORIOUS PROSPECTS SHOULD AWAKEN (ver. 3). It is common with our prophet thus to interject a song of praise on the announcement of any great and glorious event, and to call on the heavens and the earth to rejoice together (ch. xii., xlii. 10, 11, xliv. 23).

We should raise this song—

1. *Because of the glory which the fulfilment of this promise will bring to the Triune Jehovah.* Here we have a test to apply to ourselves. Every true child of God spontaneously rejoices in this expectation, just as every true patriot rejoices in any certainty of the future glory of his country.

2. *Because of the blessings the Gospel will bring to humanity.* The universal prevalence of righteousness — peace — benevolence — social elevation and secular prosperity. Wherever Christianity is received, it effects great changes in the moral and social condition of the people. What has it done in our own and other lands? Christ will rectify all wrongs, and when God is glorified man shall be honoured. "Truth shall spring out of the earth," &c. Animating, delightful, glorious prospect! When will it be realised? Not informed. All calculations respecting it vain.

CONCLUSION.—Has this Gospel come to you, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance? It has come in *word*, but unless it comes in *saving power* also, it has not accomplished its design, &c. (Ps. ii. 10–12).—*Alfred Tucker.*

(α) Look at America, with its 25,000 ministers and millions of Church members. Look at the Fijian Islands. Half a century ago the blackest spot upon the map of the world, but if you ask the watchman, "what of the night" that brooded on these islands, he answers from the watch-towers of Omniscience that it is gone! "Poor Fiji," the by-word of the nations, is become more Christian than the land that sent her Christ. Look at India. Contact with Western civilisation, education, and missionary enterprise, like the secret waters of three mighty subterranean tides, have sapped the ancient temple of Indian superstition; it trembles to its fall, and all kingdoms are shaken that that which cannot be shaken may remain. The Spirit broods over the profound depths of the heart of India, and the light is breaking. India is in search of a religion, and not long since a leading Hindu gentleman said to a famous Indian missionary that, "so far as he could see, the future sovereign of India would be Jesus Christ of Nazareth." It is thus the Gospel is rapidly and extensively spreading.—*W. J. Dawson.*

(β) India, with her 240,000,000, and China ("Sinim," most commentators are agreed that this refers to China) with her 400,000,000 inhabitants, shall gather round the central point of bliss—the largest kingdom of the world shall be converted (ver. 12).

"Many thousands have looked upon 'The Dream of Pilate's Wife,' that great picture of that great commentator in colour, Gustave Doré, and have marked as its most wonderful conception the distant Calvary with its empty cross bathed in mysterious light, and the innumerable throngs that toil upward to it with their shining faces, and the deep night-sky that seems to over-brim with angels. So the cross will shine at last above the dark continent where Moffat lived, and Livingstone died praying; over India where Carey planted his forlorn hope, and grand old Samuel Wesley would have gladly laid his dust; and the shining hosts shall be the souls of all the saved, and the wondrous light the morning of the new heaven filling the new earth; for Christ will have drawn all men unto Himself."—*W. J. Dawson.*

(γ) H. E. I. 1152.—In all the forms of false religion with which our world is filled, there is something which renders them unfit or impracticable for universal adoption. Some are adapted to particular *climates* only; others to particular states of *society*; a third class to particular *orders* of men; so that, in their very nature, they cannot be universal. But when we examine the religion of Jesus Christ, in its New Testament form, we find it divested of every feature and circumstance adapted to confine it to any particular territory or people. Its *doctrines*, its *worship*, and its system of *moral duty*, are all equally adapted to universality. . . . "Christ gives to the soul of heathendom that which it wants, and that which none other can give. (1.) A Deity in which all hearts can unite in supreme love. (2.) A creed in which all intellects can repose with unwavering confidence. (3.) A law which all consciences can approve without suspicion. (4.) An enterprise in which all souls can work without hesitancy or lack of interest."

CHRIST IN THE COVENANT.

xlix. 8. *I will give Thee for a covenant of the people.*

We all believe that our Saviour has very much to do with the covenant of eternal salvation. We have been accustomed to regard Him as the *Mediator* of the covenant, as the *surety* of the covenant, and as the scope or *substance* of the covenant (see pp. 113–115). But now I shall dwell on Christ, not as the Mediator, nor as the surety, nor as the scope of the covenant, but as one great and glorious article of the covenant which God has given to His children.

I. EXAMINE THIS PROPERTY.

Here is a great possession. Jesus Christ by covenant is the property of every believer. By this we must understand Jesus Christ in many different senses.

1. He is ours, in all His attributes. He has a double set of attributes, seeing that there are two natures joined in glorious union in one person. He has the attributes of very God, and He has the attributes of perfect man; and whatever these may be, they are each one of them the perpetual property of every believing child of God.

2. He is ours, in all His offices—prophet, priest, king, &c. How varied is the value to us of this property!

3. Christ is the believer's in every one of His works. Whether they be works of suffering or of duty, they are the property of the believer.

4. His fulness is ours (Col. ii. 9; John i. 16).

5. The very life of Christ is the property of the believer. "Because I live, ye shall live also." "Ye are dead; and your life"—where is it? It is "hid with Christ in God."

6. And best of all, the person of Jesus Christ is the property of the Christian. The wife loveth her husband; she loveth his house and his property; she loveth him for all that he giveth her, for all the bounty he confers, and all the love he bestows; but his person is the object of her affections. So with the believer; he blesses Christ for all He does and all He is.

But oh! it is Christ that is everything. He does not care so much about His offices as he does about the Man Christ.

II. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH IT WAS CONVEYED TO US.

1. Christ is in the covenant in order to comfort every coming sinner. "Oh," says the sinner who is coming to God, "I cannot lay hold on such a great covenant as that, I cannot believe that heaven is provided for me," &c. Here comes in the thought that Christ is in the covenant. Sinner, canst thou lay hold on Christ? Canst thou say,

> "Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to Thy cross I cling!"

Well, if thou hast got that, it was put in on purpose for thee to hold fast by. God's covenant mercies all go together, and if thou hast laid hold on Christ, thou hast gained every blessing in the covenant. That is one reason why Christ was put there.

2. Christ is put also to confirm the doubting saint. Sometimes he cannot read his interest in the covenant. So he lays hold of Christ, and were it not for that even the believer dare not come at all.

3. It was necessary that Christ should be in the covenant, because there are many things there which would be nought without Him. Our great redemption is in the covenant, but we have no redemption except "through His blood."

4. Christ is in the covenant to be used. Believer, use Him. Thou dost not use thy Christ as thou oughtest to do. Why, man, when thou art in trouble, &c., why dost thou not go

and tell Him? Has He not a sympathising heart, and can He not comfort and relieve thee? There is nothing Christ dislikes more than for His people to make a show-thing of Him and not to use Him.

III. A PRECEPT; and what shall the precept be? Christ is ours; then be ye Christ's. Ye are Christ's, ye know right well. Ye are His, by your Father's donation, when He gave you to the Son, &c. Show the world that you are His in practice. Stand fast in the evil day, remembering that you are one of Christ's.

CONCLUSION.—Some of you have never laid hold of the covenant. I sometimes hear it whispered, and sometimes read it, that there are men who trust to the uncovenanted mercies of God. Let me solemnly assure you that there is now no such thing in heaven as uncovenanted mercy; there is no such thing beneath God's sky or above it, as uncovenanted grace towards men. All ye can receive, and all you ever ought to hope for, must be through the covenant of free grace, and that alone. Mayhap, poor convinced sinner, thou darest not take hold of the covenant to-day. Canst thou not trust to Christ?

"Are not His mercies rich and free?
Then say, poor soul, why not for thee?"

"I dare not come; I am so unworthy," you say. Hear, then, my Master bids you come, and will you fear after that? "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heaven laden, and I will give you rest."—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. ii. pp. 393–400.

THE CHURCH SHEPHERDED BY CHRIST. (α)

xlix. 9, 10. *They shall feed in the ways, &c.*

"The comparison of God's care to that of a shepherd was first used by Jacob (Gen. xlix. 24); then by Moses (Deut. xxxii. 6, 12). From these passages the prophets borrowed the same figure (Isa. xl. 11; Ezek. xxxiv. 12, 13; Micah vii. 14). In the New Testament Christ is compared to a shepherd (John x. 11; 1 Pet. ii. 25, v. 4; Heb. xiii. 20). Travellers in the East and others record the peculiarly close and tender relationship of the Oriental shepherd to his flock."

The Saviour is here represented under the image of a shepherd, who leads forth His flock in green pastures, &c.

I. **The Divine Shepherd nourishes His flock.** "They shall feed in the ways," &c. A shepherd's express engagement to feed, tend, keep. When one pasture was bare he would lead the sheep to another, and when the herbage was deficient he would cut down the tender shoots of trees for them to eat, and he would see that they had water to drink. In thus providing for them he frequently underwent long and severe labour. Jesus provides for all the wants of His people—temporal and spiritual. He opens before them unexpected sources of supply.

The Divine life must be fed, nourished, sustained. Our Good Shepherd's provisions are plentiful, adapted, exhaustless—Himself, His Word, His ordinances, &c. With Jehovah-Jesus for our shepherd, whose hand rests on all sources of supply, we can lack no temporal or spiritual good.

II. **The Divine Shepherd protects His flock.** "Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them." They shall be sheltered from suffering like that of the intense heat of the burning sun reflected from the sandy wastes. The idea is, the Divine Shepherd will protect—shelter—His flock. This is the doctrine of the Bible, of the Old Testament as well as the New. "Whatever charge He gives His angels, He has not thereby discharged Himself, so that whether every saint has an angel for his guardian or no, we are sure he

has God Himself for his guardian, and what higher consolation can we desire?" Those are well protected who have the Lord for their protector. He has manifested Himself as the protector of His people in all ages. Did He not deliver the stripling David out of the paw of the lion and the bear? (1 Sam. xvii. 34–36; &c.) Our good Shepherd's protection is ever watchful, ever present, all-sufficient, never-failing (Ps. cxxi. 3–8, &c.) Have not *you* experienced this protection? What He has been, and what He has done in the past, He will be, and do in the future. Let us trust in the protection of our Divine Shepherd, and rejoice.

III. The Divine Shepherd leads His flock. "He that hath mercy on them shall lead them." With infallible knowledge and tender care, He goes before His people in all their journeyings. No longer by the mystic and majestic pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night does He lead them, but by the indications of His providence, by His Word, and by His Spirit, &c. He shall lead them, not *drive* them. "He"—what a leader! It is a long and perilous way, but He knows every step. Let us cheerfully follow His gracious guidance, and be assured "He leadeth us in right paths" (Ps. xxiii. 3). "The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them."

IV. The Divine Shepherd refreshes His flock. "Even by the springs of water shall He guide them." The faithful shepherd leads his flock beside cooling streams. When panting and breathless, he leads them to the "little green glen, with a quiet brooklet, and a moist lush herbage all along its course, while the 'sunbeams, like swords' are piercing everything beyond that hidden covert." So Jesus leads His flock beside many a cooling spring. The spiritual life is liable to exhaustion. But our Divine Shepherd refreshes, vivifies, quickens the spirit when wearied and exhausted and troubled—worn down with toil, and conflict, and care. The blessings of the gospel are often compared to water; they are the rivers of soul-life."

CONCLUSION. — **1.** Is Jesus your Shepherd? Have you been convinced of your far and perilous wanderings? Have you heard and obeyed the Shepherd's voice? **2.** If you acknowledge Jesus as your Shepherd, then follow, love, obey, and trust Him.—*Alfred Tucker.*

(a) See pp. 24–29.

THE IMPERFCTION OF EARTHLY BLESSINGS.

xlix. 10. *Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them, &c.*

One of the blessings promised to Christ's people in the latter days. The promise is fulfilled now to those who depart hence believing in Him. This promise reminds us—

I. That the best things when bestowed in excess become great evils. What a glorious gift to man is the sun! How essential is its heat to human life and happiness! Yet how oppressive are the heats of summer! With what terrible blows the sun sometimes smites men! Let us remember that the *measure* of a thing is as important as its *kind.* "Moderation in all things," is the wise man's motto. How necessary to remember it in regard to food, sleep, work, recreation; in the household, in regard to kindness and to severity, &c.

II. That all earthly blessings have their drawbacks. The heats of summer are great blessings; without them how poor would the harvest be in the autumn! Yet what a strain they often are on human strength! How fatal they often are to human life! Noteworthy that it can be said as a *promise,* "Neither shall the heat nor the sun smite them." So with other things; "every rose has its thorn." *Wealth,* its moral dangers (H. E. I. 4358–3364, 4389–4399, and social inconveniences (H. E. I. 4381, 4387, 4388). *Learning;*

how dearly it is often purchased (H. E. I. 3089). *Domestic happiness;* what possibilities of profound sorrow are bound up with it. "Every possession renders us capable of loss." *Long life;* how much there is in connection with old age that is undesirable.

III. That in heaven we shall have all the blessings without any of the drawbacks (H. E. I. 2721–2727).

Some practical lessons:—

1. *Let us not grumble at the natural and providential drawbacks of our earthly lot.* Let us remember that, so to speak, they are the prices of the blessings, and that if we are called to endure the drawbacks the blessings will not be withheld. Many men grumble that they have to pay an income-tax, and forget to thank God that they have an *income.* If they had not *that,* the tax-gatherer would never knock at their doors. So with the drawbacks of other blessings. Murmuring is unwise and wicked.

2. *When the conditions of our earthly life press on us most heavily, let us comfort ourselves by the remembrance of the perfect life towards which we are hastening.* The prisoner is sustained by the knowledge that the hour of his liberation is drawing nigh; the mariner, by the fact that every gale blows him nearer to the "desired haven." It is a good thing to walk *now* by faith and hope in that land where neither the heat nor the sun shall smite us (H. E. I. 216–218, 2766–2770).

3. *If the future life for God's people will be all perfection without abatement, how little should they dread that event which will introduce them to it!* Are we prepared for that wonderful transition which we call death? If so, why should we fear it? If we are not prepared for it, how shall we excuse ourselves for the insane unpreparedness in which we are living? Prepare for it, and then all the great and precious promises concerning the future life will be promises made to *you,* and that event of which the very name has been disagreeable to you will be the beginning of inconceivable joy (H. E. I. 1623–1635; P. D. 667, 694, 745).

GATHERED FROM AFAR.

(Missionary Sermon.)

xlix. 12. *Behold there shall come from far, &c.*

Whatever bearing this prophecy may have had upon the time of Isaiah, or the time immediately after him, it has an important bearing on the time of the Messiah and the course of His kingdom. The prophet sees multitudes coming into that kingdom from every quarter of the globe. Taking his position in Palestine, he mentions the north and west by name; the far country may be regarded as the south, beginning with Egypt, and running down to Southern Africa; while the east runs through Persia and India to China, which many expositors consider identical with Sinim.

The sentiment of the text is that *the redeemed Church of Christ shall come from every part of the earth.*

I. This sentiment is in accordance with the genius of the gospel.

The gospel is in the world. It exerts an immense influence over the best portions of the human race; whose excellence, indeed, is directly owing to its influence. What is its nature? It is the manifestation of God's love to man. It is not a mere declaration of the Divine existence and character, nor a mere exposition of human nature and its obligations. It is a revelation of the Divine character in its relations to man. It unfolds the way in which God deals with human sinfulness. Instead of sweeping it away by sweeping man away, He provides salvation from sin and its doom. That provision consists in the incarnation of the Son of God, who has obeyed the law and endured its curse for man. The good news is the proclamation of God's forgiving

mercy to as many as believe in Him, repenting of their sins; and the further proclamation that all needful influences and help will be supplied by the Holy Spirit for their complete regeneration and purification.

Now this is not a story likely to be concealed in the hearts of those who happen to know it. It is of such a nature that those who know it and have acted upon it instinctively desire to communicate it to others. Why? 1. Because it is true. 2. Because it redounds to the honour of its chief Personage, whom they have learned to love with supreme devotedness. 3. Because it is closely connected with the interests and destinies of the human race. Their participation of its blessing, their falling under its influence, has brought them into sympathy with the love of God to man, which, like a spark from the central fire of love, has fallen on their susceptibility and set it aflame. Men need the gospel, in life and in death; and the gospel inspires its recipients with the benevolence which cannot rest until the blessing has been universally received. Nor is it conceivable that He who provided the gospel should not desire men to avail themselves of its provisions; having prepared a home for the wanderers, He desires them to come into it.

II. This sentiment is in accordance with the spirit of prophecy.

There is a marked difference between the Christian and Jewish dispensations. The Jews, with a narrow strip of territory, were separated from the nations. Their religion was intimately associated with their national life and being. It was given to them; adapted to them. No wonder that they became possessed of the idea that God never meant to bring other nations into His Church; that therefore they never sought the conversion of the heathen, nor welcomed the idea when it was propounded.

Yet in their own Scriptures there was abundant evidence that the time would come when God would both welcome and seek the heathen. Intimations in the earlier Scriptures. Isaiah prolific of passages. He dwells on the idea, delights in it as if he had already caught the spirit of that Gospel time whose advent he was inspired to predict. Our Lord distinctly enunciates the idea in terms almost similar to those of the text (Matt. viii. 11, xxiv. 14). Paul anticipates the coming in of the fulness of the Gentiles. His labours were conducted with that view. The assumption is everywhere that in the great future the gospel shall be universally prevalent.

III. This sentiment is in accordance with the course of events.

Has the genius of the Gospel vindicated itself? Have the predictions of its attracting the heathen been verified? Take the history of the Church from the earliest time to the present. Its course has been one of steady advancement towards the point at which the predictions of its extension will be fully accomplished. During the apostolic age, although to a less extent than subsequently, the Gospel travelled north and south and east and west of Palestine. Beginning with a very small handful of Jews under persecution, before three hundred years were over it had made itself so felt that the Emperor of Rome found it his advantage to adopt it publicly. Through the centuries since, it has gradually covered a larger area. And the text is now in course of fulfilment. With a map in your hand, survey the parts of the earth in which the Gospel has been preached. You will find that it has planted its foot in every quarter, and that its converts are gathered from almost every land. China must not be overlooked. It is probably specially mentioned here. Christian missionaries of various names are attracting numbers of that multitudinous and remarkable people. As the completed fulfilment of the prophecy, there will be in heaven "a multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, who will stand before the throne and before the Lamb."

Two points may be mentioned as suggested by this subject:—1. *It recognises the brotherhood of man.* For the purposes of this prophecy, every man must be regarded as belonging to one great family, equally capable of and needing redemption. God has put the highest honour on human nature by giving His dearest and best. Let not the most degraded be supposed beyond our reach. 2. *It imposes a stupendous obligation on the Church.* God works by means. Are we doing all in our power to help those who are labouring among the heathen?—*J. Rawlinson.*

China for Christ.

xlix. 12. *Behold these shall come from . . . the land of Sinim.*

Most commentators are agreed that this refers to China. "The Arabians and other Asiatics called China *Sin* or *Tchin;* the Chinese had no special name for themselves, but either adopted that of the reigning dynasty or some high-sounding titles. This view of 'Sinim' suits the context which requires a people to be meant 'from far,' and distinct from those 'from the north and from the west'" (*Gesenius*).

In these words we have a promise of the conversion of China, the spiritual needs and claims of which the Churches of Christendom will do well to consider most prayerfully. Observe—

1. *The population, extent, and religion of China,* &c. Next to the Russian Empire, the Chinese Empire, including Mantchuria, Mongolia, and Thibet, is in extent of territory the largest in the world. China itself is one-third the size of Europe, seven times the size of France, and is equal to eleven of Great Britain and Ireland. The population is estimated at 400,000,000—twenty-two times the population of England; or more than one hundred and thirty times that of Scotland. Were *all* the subjects of the court of Pekin to march past a spectator at the rate of thirty miles a day, they would move on and on, day after day, week after week, month after month; and more than twenty-three and a half years would elapse before the last individual had passed by.

The number is inconceivable—the view is appalling. The daily mortality of China is 33,000! Think of it—a mortality which in less than three months exceeds the whole population of London;—which in a year and a half exceeds the total number of the inhabitants of England. The thought is overwhelming.

The State Religion is founded on the ethical and political maxims of the sage Confucius. His writings ignore the existence of a God and a future state, consisting mainly in the advocacy of what is expedient and useful and proper, &c. Various species of idolatry prevail—Taouism, Buddhism, ancestral worship, &c.

2. We cannot say that the amazing population of China has been altogether neglected by the Christian people of Europe and America. For some years the London Missionary Society, hoping against hope, and exhibiting a perseverance worthy of all imitation, sustained the only Mission in China, begun by the honoured Morrison in 1807. China can never again be isolated as heretofore. We have long prayed that China might be "open" to evangelical effort. Prayer has been answered; "the fields are white to the harvest," but as yet "the labourers are few," and bear no proportion to the magnitude even of the initiatory work which remains to be accomplished.

3. Among the *obstacles* which oppose themselves to Christian missions in China, may be mentioned—(1.) The theocratic assumption of the imperial government. (2.) The ignorance, immorality, conceit, and superstitiousness of the population. (3.) The system of ancestral worship—a plausible custom, but one which is a most unequivocal form of idolatry, &c. (4.) Sundry superstitions. (5.) The opium traffic, which has created a most powerful prejudice against us among the best men in the country. A Wesleyan missionary, writing home (in 1884) said, "It would interest the supporters of our society if they could hear the various objections the Chinese make on the one hand against abandoning old customs, and on the other, against becoming Christians. To give just one specimen of each kind. At the close of a service held some weeks ago at Fatshan, and when the congregation were requested to ask any questions they might wish on the address just delivered, or on the new religion generally, one man maintained very strongly that it would be wrong in him not to worship idols, for his parents had worshipped them before him. He must do as they did, or be unfilial. This reasoning (if such it may be called) was easily disposed of, but not to his satisfaction, for he still held to his point. Another man seemed, however, annoyed that nothing stronger could be urged against the Gospel, and, leaning forward, he touched the man—who was so afraid of being unfilial—on the shoulder, and said, 'You will do no good arguing that way. I tell you what to do, you just ask the foreigner, Where does the opium come from?' And with that he ran out of the chapel, and we saw him no more. Whether he thought he had really vanquished us, or he was afraid of being van-

quished, I don't know. I suppose his reasoning was something like this: 'Opium is from abroad, and is injurious; the Gospel is from abroad, and it is, *ergo*, injurious.' Or, 'The Gospel is not much good, or it would keep foreigners from hurting China; and if it has not made them good, why do they bring it here?' Opium, the impure lives of foreigners, and brandy, are the staple objections against the Gospel, when none can be found against its doctrines and morals. If opium could be got rid of, and the lives of Europeans and Americans were at all in accordance with the Bible, I am persuaded that our work would make greater progress. But as it is, opium (grown in British territory) is eating out the very life of the nation, physically and morally, among both high and low, and the ungodly lives of foreigners cause the adorable name of Jesus to be every day blasphemed among the heathen."

4. There are some *advantages* on the other hand. The press is a powerful instrument; and the circulation of the Scriptures and other books is furthered by the cheapness of printing and paper, so that the entire Bible can be sold for less than a shilling, and the New Testament for fourpence. One cheering sign of the times is the organised opposition to missionary teaching which has recently appeared; a proof that the new opinions are beginning to move the apparently inert masses of the Chinese population.

5. The ultimate conversion of China's teeming millions to Christ. Unprecedented opportunities now offer for Christian enterprise. Success has attended the labours of the past—upwards of 20,000 Chinese are now in Christian communion in Protestant Churches. A vast preparatory work has been done in a much wider circle, opening the way for the missionary reaper. Many fields are white already unto harvest. Let the Churches of Christendom obey the imperative command of their Lord, "Go ye," &c., and the stupendous work shall be accomplished in due time, for "Thus saith the Lord, behold, these shall come from the land of Sinim." Blessed be God, they are coming and shall come, until the word of promise is completely fulfilled.

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done!"

—*Alfred Tucker.*

God's Care for His Church.

xlix. 13–17. *Sing, O heavens, &c.*

I. Nothing can furnish us with better matter for songs of praise and thanksgiving than the tender care God has of the Church (ver. 13). Let the whole creation join with us in songs of joy, for it shares with us in the benefits of the redemption (Rom. viii. 19, 21).

II. The care which God has for His Church is never to be doubted by us. True, the troubles of the Church have given some occasion to question His concern for it (ver. 14). The case of His people may sometimes be so deplorable that they seem to be forsaken and forgotten by Him; and at such a time their temptation may be alarmingly violent. Weak believers, in their despondency, are ready to say, "God has forsaken us," &c. But we have no more reason to question His promise and grace, than we have to question His providence and justice. He is as sure a Rewarder as He is a Revenger. Away, therefore, with those distrusts and jealousies which are the bane of friendship. The triumphs of the Church, after her troubles, will in due time put the matter out of question (ver. 17).

III. Be assured that God has a tender affection for His Church and people (ver. 15). In answer to Zion's fears, He speaks as one concerned for His own glory; He takes Himself to be reflected upon if Zion say, "The Lord hath forsaken me;" and He will clear Himself. As one concerned also for His people's comfort, He would not have them droop and be discouraged, and give way to uneasy thoughts. You think that I have forgotten you; "can a woman forget her sucking child?" 1. It is not likely that she should. A *woman*, whose honour it is to be of the tender sex as well as the fair one, cannot but have compassion for a child, which, being both harmless and helpless, is a proper object of compassion. A *mother*, especially, cannot but be concerned for her own child, for it is her own, a piece of herself, and very lately one with her. A *nursing mother*, most of all, cannot but be tender of her sucking child. But, 2, it is possible she may forget. A woman may be so *unhappy* as not to be able to remember her sucking child;

she may be sick, dying, and going to the land of forgetfulness; or she may be so *unnatural* as not to have compassion on it (Lam. iv. 10; Deut. xxviii. 57). But, says God, "I will not forget thee." His compassions to His people infinitely exceed those of the tenderest parents toward their children (P. D. 1499).

IV. **Be assured that God has a constant care of His Church and people** (ver. 16, 17). "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," alludes to the custom of wearing signet or locket rings in remembrance of some dear friend. If we bind God's law as a sign upon our hand (Deut. vi. 8–11), He will engrave our interests as a sign on His hand, and will look upon that and remember the covenant, "Thy walls shall continually be before Me;" "thy ruined walls, though no pleasing spectacle, shall be in my thoughts of compassion." Or, "The plan and model of thy walls, that are to be rebuilt, is before Me, and they shall certainly be built according to it."—*Matthew Henry: Commentary, in loco.*

A Glorious Impossibility.

xlix. 14, 15. *But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, &c.*

I. **The believer, like Zion of old, is sometimes led to form suspicions concerning the Lord's goodness.** Such suspicions are apt to arise—1. *In periods of deep spiritual temptation:* times of dark and mysterious providences; days in which God's people "walk in darkness and have no light." Such times are apt to come upon us through neglect of prayer, through neglect of some known duty; and then, instead of blaming ourselves, we are apt to distrust God. 2. *In times of deep temporal trial.*

II. **The love of God for His people renders all such suspicions utterly unreasonable.** A mother's love for her child is tender and strong; many mothers have contentedly laid down their lives for their children; but history is full of proofs that a mother's love for her child may utterly pass away. But God's love for His people will never fail. "Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will not I forget thee." How tender, comprehensive, and touching is this figure! There is much to be considered in it: the tenderness of the tie, the helplessness of the child, the very posture of the child.

1. *The tenderness of the tie.* (α) The tie between God's children and Himself is infinitely closer than that between a child and its mother. True, the child derives its life from the mother, as the medium by which the Lord doth communicate it; but God is the life of His saints. They live and move and have their being in Him, and He lives in them.

2. *The helplessness of the child.* The helplessness and dependence of the believer is still greater. In a few months it will be able to walk alone; in a few years we shall find it not only walking and running, but labouring independently of its mother. But look at the believer—at those most advanced in the life of God, most filled with heavenly wisdom; look at "Paul the aged." He is as feeble, as dependent, as helpless in himself as at the first moment (1 Cor. xv. 10).

3. *The posture of the child:* that is more touching still. There are few sights more endearing, as every mother will acknowledge, than that of a child hanging on her bosom, deriving the support of its physical life from herself. It is one of the most touching pictures that can be presented to our eye. And yet, compared with that of a believer, it is as nothing. His is not an unconscious hanging upon the author and sustainer of His being; His is a conscious, glad dependence upon God for those supplies that come from His Father's heart, and minister to His spiritual life—

that life which is the commencement of life eternal. Who can compare the one with the other? It is a closer tie, a tenderer tie, a more dependent object, and a posture infinitely more endearing. No wonder God gives the strong assurance which our text contains.

III. God's love for His people manifests itself in a constant remembrance of their condition and needs. "Yet will I not forget thee," is only another way of saying, "I will always remember thee." 1. He does not forget their *persons* (verse 16). 2. Nor the *work of grace that is in them.* It is described as His poem: "we are His workmanship"—His poem (Eph. ii. 10). A man takes care of his book; but if he has his own poem, will he be likely to forget that? 3. Nor their *trials* (ch. xliii. 2). 4. Nor *their returns to Him* (Jer. xxxi. 18). 5. Nor their *obedience* (ch. lxiv. 5; Heb. vi. 10). 6. Nor their needs in *death* (Ps. cxvi. 15). Blessed truth, it is full of unutterable sweetness.

The subject is full of instruction. 1. It should lead to self-examination. Are we of the number of those whom God knows, in the sense of reproving and acknowledging as His? If He does not thus know us, how can we expect Him to remember us? 2. A sight of the helpless child hanging upon its mother's breast should show us our own dependency, and take away every thought of self-sufficiency. 3. The fickleness of the tenderest of human affections brings out more clearly into view the glory of God's love for His people. 4. The constancy of the Divine love should make us ashamed of our despondency and distrust in times of trial. 5. If God never forgets us, we should never forget Him.—*J. H. Evans, M.A., Thursday Penny Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 305–316.

(α) The young of all creatures are lovely and attractive always: but let us survey the image here. Here is a child, a harmless object, a helpless object, an endeared object, and towards which *any* one may feel compassion and tenderness. But you will observe that the child *here* is the mother's *own*—"the son of her womb;" lately a part of herself, and endeared by the anxieties of bearing it, and the pain and peril of bringing it forth. Nor is this all; for the mother is a *nursing* mother. Isaiah scorned to take an image of exquisite tenderness from those wretches who, when they have it in their power, devolve this pleasing and (ask all the physicians) this *salutary* duty upon others, upon strangers, and upon hirelings; no, it is a *nursing* mother, and the child is a "*sucking* child," looking up with ineffable satisfaction to his benefactor, and with his little hands stroking the cheeks of her who feeds him.—*Jay.*

I. A MOURNFUL COMPLAINT (ver. 14). The wicked think too much of the goodness of God, in reference to themselves; they mistake the effects of His general bounty for evidences of His peculiar friendship (H. E. I. 3977–3980). The very reverse of this is the disposition of all subjects of Divine grace; they know that self-deception is tremendous, probable, common, and are therefore afraid of it; they often carry their solicitude beyond the point of duty; they apply to themselves what was intended for others, and sometimes think themselves forsaken of God.

1. This arises sometimes (1.) from *the weakness of their faith* (α. H. E. I. 2014–2017). (2.) From *ignorance;* they have a knowledge of God, but it is very imperfect, and therefore they form mistaken apprehensions as to the manner in which He is likely to deal with them. (3.) From *a suspension of divine manifestation.* The sun is always in the sky, but it is not always visible. God hides Himself from the house of Jacob; and if you are part of the house of Jacob, you will be affected thereby (Ps. xxx. 7). When He does this, it is not in the mere exercise of Divine sovereignty, but either as a prevention of sin, or as correction for it (Isa. lix. 2; Hos. v. 15; Job xv. 11; H. E. I. 1644–1659). (4.) From *conflict with the troubles of life.* It is forgotten that these are really proofs that God has not forsaken us (Prov. xiii. 24; Heb. xii. 6; H. E. I. 189–

196, 3692 - 3695). (5.) Sometimes from *God's delay in the accomplishment of prayer.* Distinguish between the acceptance and the answer of prayer; God always immediately hears, but does not always immediately answer the prayer of faith (2 Pet. iii. 9; Lam. iii. 26; H. E. I. 3884–3899).

2. Who can find language to express the wretchedness such a false conclusion causes? The misery produced by it in a child of God is due to three causes:—(1.) He *loves* God, not perfectly, but supremely; and love can never be reconciled to the absence of its object. (2.) He entirely *relies* upon Him, and therefore feels that if God has withdrawn from him, all must be darkness, dreariness, desolation, and death. (3.) He has *enjoyed* Him already, and therefore nothing can satisfy him but God (H. E. I. 1018, 2378–2387).

II. A SATISFACTORY ANSWER (ver. 15). Notice, 1. *The improbability of the fear.* This is metaphorically expressed. The case supposed is not likely, but it is possible. But the tenderest feelings of nature are as nothing when compared with the kindness of God. 2. *The certainty of the assurance.* "Yet will not I forget thee." With God there is no fickleness (Num. xxiii. 19). —H. E. I. 2324, P. D. 815. 3. *The all-sufficiency of the truth established;* that is, the perpetual regard of God for us. If His favour is set upon us, it secures everything else (Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 12).

Concluding remarks.—1. Distresses and discouragements are not incompatible with religion (H. E. I. 339–346, 2907). 2. See how concerned God is, not only for His people's safety, but for their comfort also. Let His people fall in with this design (Ps. xlii. 11). 4. Do not take the comfort belonging to a gracious state, unless you are the subjects of a gracious character.—*W. Jay:* "*The British Pulpit,*" vol. v. pp. 221–230.

(a) Our comfort must always be according to our faith. "In whom," says Peter, "*believing*, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." There is always consolation in God's riches of glory by Christ Jesus; but these can only be perceived and apprehended by faith. There is always fruit enough upon the tree of life, but faith in the hand by which alone we gather it. There is water enough always in the wells of salvation, but by faith we must draw it.—*Jay*, H. E. I. 1252–1285.

We have here two assertions; Zion's and God's.

I. ZION'S ASSERTION. "The Lord hath forsaken me," &c. Observe four things which may cause this complaint:—1. The mysteriousness of Divine providence. 2. The long duration of Zion's troubles. 3. Lack of success. 4. Zion's own sinfulness and weakness.

II. GOD'S ASSERTION. "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" &c. "Yet will I never forget thee." Why?

1. He is too nearly related to Zion. 2. He bestows too much thought upon Zion. 3. He has done too much on behalf of Zion. 4. He has given too many promises—great and precious—to Zion. 5. He expects too much from Zion. 6. He hath ordained that Zion shall for ever dwell in His immediate presence. "For ever with the Lord." God, then, cannot forget His people.

Improvement. 1. Zion should at once withdraw her complaint. 2. As God will never forget Zion, Zion should never forget her God. 3. Zion should never despond in the presence of any untoward event which may overtake her. —*W. Roberts, Penybontfawr,* "*Pregethau.*"

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1. *God's love is like a mother's love.* There is no love in this world like a mother's love. It is free, unbought, unselfish (P. D. 2357). God's love to a soul in Christ is stronger (Ps. ciii. 13, 14; Mal. iii. 17; Isa. lxvi. 13; H. E. I. 2322–2333; P. D. 1499). Be not cast down in affliction (H. E. I. 189–196). Deserted souls, God's love cannot change unless His true nature change. Not till God cease to be holy, just, and true, will He cease to love the soul that hides under the wings of Jesus (H. E. I. 2324).

2. *His love is full love.* A mother's love is the fullest love which we have

on earth. She loves with all her heart. But there is no love full but that of God toward His Son; God loves Jesus fully—the whole heart of the Father is as it were continually poured down in love upon the Lord Jesus. But when a soul comes to Christ, the same love rests on that soul (John xvii. 26). True, a creature cannot receive the love of God as Jesus can; but it is the same love that shines on us and Him—full, satisfying, unbounded love. How can God forget what He fully loves? A creature's love may fail; for what is a creature?—a clay vessel, a breath of wind that passeth away and cometh not again. But the Creator's love cannot fail—it is full love toward an object infinitely worthy of His love—in which thou sharest.

3. *It is an unchanging love.* A mother's love is, of all creature-love, the most unchangeable. But far more unchanging is the love of God to Christ, and to a soul in Christ: "I am the Lord; I change not." The Father that loves has no variableness. Jesus who is loved, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. How can that love change? It flowed before the world was; it will flow when the world has passed away. If you are in Christ, that love shines on you (Jer. xxxi. 3; Rom. viii. 38, 39).—*R. M. M'Cheyne: Sketches of Sermons.*

These words apply, first of all, to God's ancient people, the Jews, but they are equally true of all believers.

I. There are times when believers are apt to think themselves forsaken.

1. *In time of sore affliction.* So it was with Naomi, Hezekiah, Job. It is a sad thing when the soul faints under the rebukes of God. They were intended to lead you deeper into Christ—into a fuller enjoyment of God (H. E. I. 66–70).

2. *When they have fallen into sin.* As long as a believer walks humbly with his God, his soul is at peace. But the moment that unbelief creeps in, he is led away into sin—like David he falls very low. A believer generally falls lower than the world; and now he falls into darkness. When Adam fell, he was afraid; and he hid himself from God among the trees of the garden, and he made a covering of leaves. When a believer falls, he also is afraid—he hides from God.

3. *In time of desertion.* Desertion is God withdrawing from the soul of a believer; so that His absence is felt. Sometimes it pleases God to withdraw from the soul, chiefly, I believe, to humble us in the dust; or to discover some corruption unmortified; or to lead us to hunger more after Him. Such was the state of David when he wrote Psalm xlii. (Job vi. 4; xxix. 1, 2; H. E. I. 1644–1659).

II. God cannot forget a soul in Christ: "Can a woman," &c.

TO THE PREACHER. 1. *Comfort downcast believers.* Your afflictions and desertions only prove that you are under the Father's hand. There is no time when the patient is an object of such tender interest to the surgeon, as when he is under his knife; so, you may be sure, if you are suffering from the hand of God, His eye is all the more bent on you (Deut. xxxiii. 27).

2. *Invite poor sinners to come and taste of this love.* It is a sweet thing to be loved. I suppose the most of you have tasted a mother's love; but this is nothing to the love of your God.

Oh! it is sweet to pass from wrath to love—from death to life. That poor murderess would leap in her cell, when the news came that she was not to die the murderer's death; but, ah! ten thousand times sweeter would it be to you, if God were, this day, to persuade you to embrace Christ freely offered in the gospel.—*R. M. M'Cheyne. Sermons and Lectures*, pp. 99–105.

GRAVEN UPON JEHOVAH'S HANDS.

xlix. 16. *Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.*

The prophets were more than half poets. The language here is highly figurative. It is a bold anthropomorphism. The words are used of Zion, the Church of God. That glorious building, complete in the Divine idea, is regarded as graven upon God's hands. Each individual member of the spiritual Zion has his own place therein marked out by Jehovah. It is to the individual reference implied in the text that attention is invited.

I. Amid temptations to regard ourselves forgotten of the Lord, how consoling is the reflection that the life of the true believer in God is linked with the life of the Eternal! "Where there is no eye to see reality," it has been said, "there is ever an eye-brow waiting to rise in scornful wonder at the name of it." And again, "Where the substantial hand to grasp things worthy is wanting, there is always some thin shadow-hand to wave them off with mocking gestures." But spiritual discernment embraces the fact, that man, and especially the Christ-like man, lives in God. The being of the godly is bound up with the being of God; they are specially dear to God, shall never be lost sight of by Him, have their life hid with Christ in God, and go forward to the fulness of life, to the pleasures, which, according to another use of the same figure, are said to be at God's *right hand* for evermore. To speak after this manner is no doubt mysticism to the unspiritual. But the obscurity is in them. Not always is this momentous truth quite clear even to the spiritual; but it is peculiarly dark and unintelligible to those whose understanding has not been enlightened from above: for it is one of those things which "are spiritually discerned."

II. Why it is often hard for even the believer in God to realise this union. Many reasons might be suggested. Consider one. *The world is but a small part of the universe, and man's life on earth bears but a small proportion to his God-given immortality.* Hence the obscurity resting upon the *purpose* to which all things tend, and also upon the *tendency itself* as residing in the means to the end. Chance and accident seem to rule widely in this world. The goal is reached by much of seeming waste, sacrifice, and sorrow (H. E. I. 4033, 4034). As for the world, so for the individual, there is a divine idea, but it is a mosaic, beautiful as a whole, we may believe, yet tesselated with innumerable fragments. Why trouble ourselves unnecessarily, complaining till ourselves are hoarse, and others miserable?—why not just fall in to our little work patient, and believing that the Divine purpose is good, and will yet sparkle forth like a bright jewel from the short period of confusion? (H. E. I. 4047).

III. Consider some part of the proof that our union with God endures and is indissoluble. 1. The believer in God should find it easy to convince himself that there is much *undeveloped power* in the Church which shall yet be made manifest. And so with the individual. The feeling of undeveloped power within us, this feeling that there *is life* within us down below our present life, is identical with being graven on Jehovah's hands. We do not know the possibility of our being, but we feel within us depths that no man knows, and which we ourselves can appreciate with no distinctness.

2. Do not suppose, because you have been appointed a humble place in the world's work, because your luxuries are few, and your hands never idle, and sickness like a lion ever crouching at the door of your house, that God has forgotten you, and not graven out your place on the palms of His hands. Poverty, weakness, suffering, shame, are not these just so many powers plying to bring up into play the deep, Divine life? (H. E. I. 91–98). In ways

we cannot fathom, God is showing us that He remembers us, is present, ordaining for the best, in every circumstance of life. For the bringing of order out of seeming confusion, it is *necessary to believe* that He is present in the most trivial circumstances, and, as Christ says, numbers the very hairs of your head.—*J. M. Simcock.*

The text belongs primarily to the seed of Israel; next, to the whole Church as a body; and then to every individual member.

I. Consider our text verbally. Every single word deserves to be emphasised.

1. "*Behold.*" *It is a word of wonder;* intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation. Here, indeed, we have a theme for marvelling. Heaven and earth may well be astonished that God should grave upon His hands the names of sinners. Speak of the seven wonders of the world, why this is a wonder in the seventh heavens! No doubt a part of the wonder which is concentrated in the word "Behold," is excited by the unbelieving lamentation of the preceding sentence. How the Divine mind seems to be amazed at this wicked unbelief of man! What can be more astounding than the unfounded doubts and fears of God's favoured people? He seems to say, "How can I have forgotten thee, when I have graven," &c. Here follows the great marvel, that God should be faithful to such a faithless people, and that when He is provoked with their doubting, He nevertheless abideth true. Behold! and be ashamed and confounded for all your cruel doubts of your indulgent Lord.

2. Behold, "*I* have," &c. The Divine Artist, who has been pleased to engrave His people for a memorial, is none other than God Himself. Here we learn the lesson which Christ afterwards taught His disciples—"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." No one can write upon the hand of God but God Himself. Neither our merits, prayers, repentance, nor faith, can write our names there, for these in their goodness extend not unto God so as to write upon His hands. Then, again, if the Lord hath done it, *there is no mistake about it.* If some human hand had cut the memorial, the hieroglyphs might be at fault; but since perfect wisdom has combined with perfect love to make a memorial of the saints, then no error by any possibility can have occurred; there can be no erasures, no crossing out of what God has written, no blotting out of what the Eternal hath decreed.

3. "Behold, I *have* graven thee" Not, "I will," nor yet, "I am doing it;" it is a thing of the past, and how far back in the past! Oh! the antiquity of this inscription! Do not these deep things comfort you? Does not eternal love delight you?

4. "*Graven.*" I have not merely printed thee, stamped thee on the surface, but I have permanently cut thee into my hand with marks which never can be removed. That word "graven" sets forth the perpetuity of the inscription.

5. "I have graven *thee*," &c. "My Lord, dost thou mean me? Yes, even me, if I by faith cling to Thy cross." "I have graven *thee.*" It does not say, "Thy name." The name is there, but this is not all; "I have graven *thee.*" See the fulness of this! I have graven everything about thee, all that concerns thee; it is a full picture, as though the man himself were there.

6. We are engraven, where? Upon *His hands*, not upon the works of His hands. *They* shall perish; yea, they shall all wax old as doth a garment, but His hands shall endure for ever. Notice, it does not say, "I have graven thee upon the palm of one hand," but "I have graven thee upon the *palms of My hands.*" There are two memorials. His saints shall never be forgotten, for the inscription is put there upon the palm of this hand, the right hand of blessing,

and upon the palm of that hand, the left hand of justice.

Now let us proceed to the second part of the subject—

II. Consider the text as a whole. God's remembrance of His people is—1. *Constant.* 2. *Practical.* He will work and show Himself strong for His people; He brings His omnipotent hands to effect our redemption. 3. *Eternal.* You cannot suppose it possible that any person can erase what is written on God's hand. 4. *Tender.* 5. *Most surprising.* Child of God, let your cheerful eyes and your joyful heart testify how great a wonder it is that you, once so far estranged from God, are this day written on the palms of His hands. 6. *Most consolatory.* There is no sorrow to which our text is not an antidote.

III. Be heedful of the duty which such a text suggests. 1. If you be partakers of this precious text, *is it not your duty to leave your cares behind you to-day?* Should not the fact that God always graciously and tenderly recollects you, compel you once for all to leave your burden with Him who careth for you? 2. *If this text is not yours, how your mouths ought to water after it!* Is there a soul here who says, "O that I had a part and lot in this matter!" Thou mayest have His pardoning love shed abroad in thy heart even now.—*C. H. Spurgeon, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 512.

The Promised Increase of the Church.

xlix. 18–23. *Lift up thine eyes round about, &c.*

Two things are here promised, which were to be in part accomplished in the reviving of the Jewish church, after its return out of captivity, but more fully in the planting of the Christian Church, by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ; and we may take the comfort of these promises.

I. That the Church shall be replenished by the adding to it of great numbers. It was promised (ver. 17) that her children should "make haste;" that promise is here enlarged upon, and is made very encouraging. It is promised—

1. That *multitudes shall flock to the Church from all parts* (ver. 18). They came to Jerusalem from all the adjacent countries, for that was then the centre of their unity; but, under the Gospel, it is by a spiritual accession to the mystical body of Christ in faith and love (Heb. xii. 22, 23). It is a matter of joy to the Church to see a multitude of converts to Christ.

2. That *such as are added to the Church shall not be a burthen and blemish to her, but her strength and ornament* (ver. 18). This promise is accomplished, and only then, when those who are added to the Church are serious, holy, and exemplary in their conversation.

3. That *the country which was waste, desolate, and without inhabitant, shall be again peopled, nay, it shall be overpeopled* (ver 19). What a reversal of the sentence previously and justly passed! (ch. v. 9–13, vi. 11). The kingdom of God among men, which had been impoverished and almost depopulated, partly by the corruptions of the Jewish church, and partly by the abominations of the Gentile world, was again peopled and enriched by the setting up of the Christian Church, and by its graces and glories.

4. That *the new converts shall strangely increase and multiply* (ver. 20). Jerusalem, after she has lost abundance of children by the sword, famine, and captivity, shall have a new family growing up instead of them (Zech. viii. 5). So the Church, after it has lost the Jews, cut off by their own infidelity, shall have abundance of children still, more than she had when the Jews belonged to her (Gal. iv. 27). They shall be so numerous that (1.) the children shall complain for want of room (*cf.* 2 Kings vi. 1). Yet still more shall desire to be admitted, and the Church shall gladly admit them, and the inconvenient straitness of th'

place shall be no hindrance to either (Luke xiv. 21, 22). (2.) The mother shall stand amazed at the increase of her family (ver. 21). The Church may at times be few in number, and left desolate. Yet the desolations shall not be perpetual, nor will it be found hard for God to repair them, and out of stones to raise up children to Abraham. The increase of the Church is always due, not to the efforts of the Church, however well and wisely they may be put forth, but to the blessing of God (1 Cor. iii. 7).

5. That *this shall be done with the help of the Gentiles* (ver. 23). Observe, (1.) How the Gentiles shall be called in. (2.) The kindly service they shall render to the sons of Zion.

II. That the Church shall have a great and prevailing interest in the nations (ver. 23).

1. *Some of the princes of the nations shall become patrons and protectors to the Church.* "And kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers." (α)

2. *Others of them, who stand only against the Church's interests, will be forced to yield, and repent of their opposition.* "They shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet." And by all this it shall be made to appear—(1.) That God is the sovereign Lord of all, against whom there is no standing out or rising up. (2.) That those who wait for Him, in dependence upon His promise and resignation to His will, shall not be made ashamed of their hope.—*Matthew Henry: Commentary, in loco.*

(α) This promise was in part fulfilled to the Jews after their return out of captivity; divers of the kings of Persia were very tender of their interests, countenanced and encouraged them, as Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes; Esther the queen was a nursing-mother to the Jews that remained in their captivity, putting her life in her hand to snatch the child out of the flames. The Christian Church, after a long captivity was happy in some such kings and queens as Constantine and his mother Helena, and afterwards Theodosius and others, who nursed the Church with all possible care and tenderness. Whenever the sceptre of government is put into the hands of religious princes, this promise is fulfilled.—*M. Henry.*

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1. *The promised increase of the Church.* 1. In number. 2. In honour 3. In triumph.

II. *The encouragement it affords us for missionary exertions.* 1. God is able to effect this great thing. 2. He has engaged to effect it. 3. The beginnings are already visible before our eyes.

APPLY.—1. Let our expectations of it be enlarged. 2. Let our prayers for it be poured forth. 3. Let our exertions be used.—*C. Simeon, M.A*

THE DUTY OF THE RULERS OF NATIONS IN REGARD TO THE CHURCH OF GOD.

xlix. 23. *Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers.*

The Church is here foreseen and described in her abased condition—a captive, oppressed, in exile, diminished, feeble, afflicted, brought low. The prophet anticipates and predicts her restoration, increase, and glory; and he calls upon heaven and earth to rejoice in the event (ver. 13). It is evident that the predicted blessedness comprehended a vast deal more than the restoration from the Babylonish captivity. The prophet speaks of the admission of the Gentiles into the Church of God; multitudes were thereby to be added to it (ver. 6, 7, 12, 18). Then we are informed in what manner and by what means the Lord will bring all this to pass (ver. 22, 23). The obvious meaning is, that the Lord would so overrule the hearts and ways of men, in the accomplishment of His gracious designs, as that, even where they were themselves not partakers of His mercy, He

would dispose them to favour His cause; and whether with or against their consent, He would so work upon them as to make them instrumental in the deliverance of His Church and the promotion of His glory. Nor should this wonderful exertion of the Divine wisdom and power be confined to the lower classes; even kings and queens should deem it their highest honour to take part in so great a work.

The present truths which this prophecy brings before us are these:—that all rulers of nations should now exert their power for the extension and welfare of the Church; that it would be for their happiness and honour were they so engaged; and that they cannot neglect this duty, or disregard this privilege, without incurring the most awful responsibility, and provoking God to mark them out as signally in the execution of His judgments, as they are elevated above others in rank and dignity.

I. The rulers of the nations are the servants of God (Prov. viii. 15). According to the teaching of His Word, He, by various providential means, calls them and appoints them to their work; and holds them responsible for the manner in which they execute it. The mightiest potentates of old are, for these reasons, spoken of as His servants: Cyrus (Isa. xli. 1–4, xliv. 24–28, xlv. 1–6); Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xxv. 9, xliii. 10); Pharaoh (Exod. ix. 13–16). So it is still.

II. As such, they are bound, above all things, to promote the honour of His name in the welfare of His church and people. All who are entrusted with the ruling authority are bound to promote the best interests of the people over whom they preside. But what are these? Not the extension of territory, the spread of conquest, the multiplicity of resources, the advancement of the arts and sciences, of wealth and honour, business and trade; these cannot be neglected without a gross violation of the trust with which rulers are invested; but a nation's best interests are those that are distinctly religious. It is on the promotion of these that the true happiness of nations depends, and therefore it is to the furtherance of these that the attention and energy of their rulers be most constantly and carefully given.

III. A discharge or disregard of this obligation will always yield a sure test of their own state and the character of their government. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

IV. Where this duty is intelligently recognised and reverently obeyed by rulers, certain things are certain to occur:—

1. *There will be on the part of the rulers deep humiliation before God, coupled with free and ingenuous confessions both of individual and national guilt.* No man can ever heartily desire or attempt to promote the glory of God without perceiving how grievously he has hitherto neglected his bounden obligation; and how unworthy he is, either of the mercy which is requisite for his salvation, or of the honourable service to which he is called. This discovery and conviction will lay him low before God (Ezra ix. 5–7; Dan. ix. 4–6).

2. *There will be desire to seek the guidance and acknowledge the hand of God in everything.* Whoever aims to serve God aright will never set about such a work in his own wisdom and strength. What a pattern for all princes and rulers is the prayer of Solomon! (1 Kings iii. 5–15). In national adversity and prosperity alike, the superintending providence of God will be recognised (Job x. 2; Ps. cxviii. 23).

3. *There will be on the part of the rulers a fixed determination to banish all wicked men from their presence, and to exclude them from their councils* (Ps. ci.; P. D. 2157).

4. *There will be an anxiety to fill all the offices of the Church and State with men that fear the Lord, love the truth, and who will labour with heart and hand for the promotion of true godliness.* When a man is brought under the influence of the principles now set

forth, the question will be, not merely what shall I do immediately by mine own hand, but what am I able to accomplish through the agency of others? If "he who ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God," they that bear office and authority under Him must be men actuated by the same motives, and aiming at the same object.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS. — 1. How evident it is, that it is not to an easy office that any man is called when he is exalted to a throne, or entrusted with the affairs of a kingdom! (P. D. 2143.) 2. How disastrous is the influence, and how great is the guilt, of ungodly princes and rulers! (P. D. 2145–2147). 3. How earnestly should we pray for our rulers, that God may bless them and direct them in all His ways! (P. D. 2153).—*R. Shittler, in the Protestant Preacher*, vol. iii. pp. 419–438.

THE RESULT OF WAITING UPON GOD.

xlix. 23. *They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me.*

For the godless of every kind, for hypocrites in particular, the future is full of dread. Millions shall be put to shame, and given over to everlasting contempt. But not so shall it be with one of those who wait upon God.

I. WAITING UPON GOD. This signifies, 1. A patient expectation of the fulfilment of His word, whether it be a prophecy or a promise. 2. A regular attention to the means of grace (see vol. i. pp. 179, 332, and pp. 38–49 of this volume).

II. THE RESULT OF WAITING UPON GOD. Not disappointment and humiliation, but prayers answered and hopes fulfilled. Those shall not be ashamed: 1. The penitent who feels the bitterness of trangressions, and laments it with a broken and contrite heart, and waits upon God, seeking for pardon and righteousness through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. 2. The Christian who is relying upon the providential help of a covenant-keeping God. 3. The believer who is waiting for the accomplishment of God's grace in himself, in the sanctification of his heart. 4. The Christian waiting for the coming of Christ, and the crown of righteousness which shall then be given to all who love His appearing. — *Thomas Blackley, A.M.: Practical Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 182–199.

THE DIVINE SLOWNESS.

xlix. 23. "*Wait.*"

This word is the one word which the Divine wisdom often seems to utter in rebuke of human impatience. In holy Scripture men are often counselled to wait; to wait upon God, to wait for God: language which supposes delay and the need of patience. Man is eager, hurried, impatient—everywhere so, but God is never in haste. The Divine proceedings are slow—everywhere slow. This is a great fact; a fact full of light, such as should contribute to guide us safely through many a season of darkness.

I. We see it in the realms of nature and providence. 1. *The history of the earth* is illustrative of it. Concerning the process by which the heavens became peopled with the brilliancies we now see there, we know nothing, &c. But we have some knowledge of the changes through which this earth had to pass before it became a fitting habitation for man. In the solitude of those far-off ages progressive change gave existence to progressive life—the lives of plants and of animals, &c. During those long eras the Eternal was here alone. Of beings conscious of His being, none would seem to have been with Him. Man is to come; but for him there is to be long waiting, &c. And He would have men regard the operation of His hands, so that

they also may know how to wait. There is something divine in being able so to do.

2. There is something in the *movement of the seasons* tending to remind us of this great law. The changes of day and night, how slow, how gradual, how imperceptible! How gentle is the coming of the light! How silently and slowly does it give place to darkness! These might have come with suddenness, as if from a hurried hand; but they do not, &c.

3. There is something in *the history of all life* adapted to convey the same lesson. Life, whether in plants or animals, is everywhere a growth; and all growth is silent, gradual, so gradual as not to be perceived. All this is rooted in mystery. *Individual life in man*, in the sense of education or development, is in harmony with all that has gone before it. But the truth we are illustrating is seen conspicuously in the *history of national life*. If the education of an individual be so slow, what marvel if the education of a people should be very slow? (H. E. I. 3420.)

II. So far we see, from facts in nature and providence, it behoves us to guard against impatience in judging the ways of God, and to know how to wait. *Religion, revealed religion, includes much in harmony with those facts.* It is, moreover, in these phases of religion that we find some of the aspects of it which are often especially perplexing to Christians.

1. We see a fact of this nature in *the long interval which was to pass between the promise of a Saviour and His advent.* Sin enters the world, &c. Four thousand years pass, and the Promised One does not come. Now in the history of the earth, in the slowness of the changes through which it was to pass before it came to be what it was to be, we see enough to prevent our being greatly surprised by such a fact. What was to be gained by this delay, we can know only in part.

2. So when the Saviour did come, *the manner of His coming* was not such as the thoughts of man would have anticipated. The kingdom of God was to come without observation (Luke xvii. 20). It was to begin with small beginnings. Its Founder was to be to many as a root out of a dry ground, as one without form and comeliness, &c. But these facts are in harmony with the Divine conduct as known elsewhere. It is not the manner of the Almighty to cause great things to become great at once. Our Lord revealed Himself even to His disciples gradually, slowly, imperfectly. If the Church, which is to fill the world, had its beginning in the hut of a fisherman, or in the upper room in Jerusalem, this is only in accordance with the Divine law of things. The great forces of nature all move thus, without noise, without haste, so secretly that we never know their beginnings, and so slowly that we can never see their motion, though we know that they are moving.

3. Nor is it without mystery to many minds that the *history of revealed religion since the advent* should have been such as it has been. No truth the world had ever possessed had been proof against corruption. Out of all the evolutions of error, out of all the devices of evil, He will educe lessons for the future which shall cause His universe to be upon the whole the wiser and the better for all that has happened. But for this we must wait. Often we see good come out of evil. In the end we shall see that all things have been regulated towards such an issue. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

4. If we descend from the general life of the Church to the *spiritual history of the individual believer*, we may find much there to remind us that the experience of the Church at large and of the Christian, taken separately, are regulated by the same intelligence. In our tendency towards haste we naturally wish to see the world converted soon, very soon. So when we enter on the Christian life, we covet that it should be matured speedily. But it does not so mature. We unlearn the evil slowly; we learn the good still more slowly, &c. All this is very humiliating and very

painful. But, as the good in the Church is to be tasked and strengthened by being exposed to the evil in the world, so the better principles and tendencies in the Christian are to become more rooted and powerful by means of this personal conflict. Here, as everywhere, we are schooled to wait (H. E. I. 2508–2530).

5. So it is with *the events which make up the story of a life.* The meaning of some of these we may see at once; we feel that we need the sort of discipline they bring with them; we pray with the devoutest ancient, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me;" and the wherefore is not allowed to remain a secret. Paul's thorn in the flesh was an experience of this nature, painful in many ways, but declared to be salutary for his inner and higher life. But in most instances of this kind, we have to wait, it may be to wait long, before we see the Divine purpose in the things which befall us. With regard to much in our history, we are expected to wait for the revelations of the world to come. It need scarcely be said that the waiting intended is not mere passiveness; it is to be as those who wait for the bridegroom, not in sleep, but with loins girt about and lamps burning. (See pp. 38–49).—*Robert Vaughan, D.D., Pulpit Analyst*, vol. iii. pp. 1–15.

The Prey Taken from the Mighty.

xlix. 24–26. *Shall the prey be taken from the mighty? &c.*

The history of God's love to His people is a ground of encouragement and hope to the Church in all aftertime, because God, human nature, and the power and influence of religion are always the same. The text turns upon the difficulty of conveying hope and comfort to disconsolate minds. The prophet had been giving to the disconsolate glorious promises of the future restoration of the Church (ver. 18–23), but he was met by the difficulty of their inability to believe that those promises could be fulfilled. They asked, thinking that only an unfavourable answer could be given to their question, "Shall the prey," &c. Mark the confidence of the prophet's answer, "But thus saith the Lord," &c. Various lawful, instructive, and encouraging uses may be made of our text.

I. Apply the text literally to Israel's release from Babylon. The captives saw great and apparently insuperable difficulties in the way of their restoration. The news seemed too good to be true. There was the great strength of the Babylonian empire, and their unbelief argues, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?" There was the fact that they were a conquered people, and that their enemies, according to the usages of war, had an accredited right to hold them in subjection. "Shall the lawful captive be delivered?" (*a*) Then they had no alliances, and no hold upon the political sympathies of foreign nations; and lastly, there was their own incapacity of self-belief, their wives and children being with them in the power of the enemy, as so many hostages for their good conduct.

Note how amply the promises of the text meet these sources of discouragement. It is answered by a "Thus saith the Lord," *i.e.*, hopeless as the case may seem to you, all the difficulties shall give way when I interpose. "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away," &c.; "though they be a nation strong and powerful, ye shall be rescued from their hands, for I will oppose My strength and wisdom to theirs, and the resources of My providence to all the pride of their power." God Himself would come down into the field as their champion: "I will contend," &c. Nay, more: He promises to make the ruin of the foe conspicuous as the deliverance of His friends. "I will feed

them that oppress thee with their own flesh, and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as sweet wine;" *i.e.*, He would cause them to destroy one another with as much eagerness as half-famished men fall upon a well-furnished table; they shall hasten to that banquet of blood with as much fervour as men hasten to a banquet of wine. The historian tells us that on the night in which Babylon was taken many of the Chaldeans fell off from Belshazzar and joined the standard of Cyrus; they were themselves most forward in surprising the city, and showing the way into the king's palace, where they slew him and all his attendants. Thus the promise of the text was fulfilled by the overthrow of the reigning government, and the introduction of a new dynasty to the throne. So completely was this done, that the captives were as much overpowered by the greatness of their deliverance as they had before been confounded by the depth of the calamity (Ps. cxxvi. 1).

Learn, then, how fully God can make good His promises, and disperse the worst fears of His people. "The Lord can clear the darkest skies." And He does it with as much tenderness as power (ver. 15). The captives feared more for their beloved families than for themselves, as you do for yours, and the promise respects them: "And I will save thy children."

II. Apply it spiritually to man's redemption by Christ. To the convicted sinner, human redemption has often seemed incompatible with the inalienable claims of Divine justice, which seem to demand that the punishment of the transgressors should take its course. God cannot connive at sin; and the law we have broken is holy, just, and good, as necessary to the happiness of the universe as it is essential to the glory of God; a law too good to be repealed, too sacred to be trifled with; the abrogation of it would dethrone the Deity, and pour anarchy through all the worlds He has made (H. E. I. 3157, 3188). How then shall the great dilemma which sin has introduced be met? If mercy triumphs, justice is tarnished; if justice prevail, man is overthrown for ever. Mere power has no force in regard to moral questions; it cannot make right wrong, or wrong right. To solve this question was a task for Omniscience: God dealt with it, and through Scripture has made known to us its solution (ch. liii. 5, 6; Rom. iii. 19–26, &c.; H. E. I. 375–382, 396). Justice triumphs in the death of Christ, and mercy triumphs in the pardon of penitent sinners through Him. The very idea of *redemption* turns upon this point. It means the buying back again of lost and forfeited good, by a compensative arrangement between the parties. In ancient times the lives of prisoners taken in war were held to be at the disposal of the conqueror, and the acceptance of a stipulated ransom was the established mode of buying back the lives and liberty of the prisoners. The law of God, with all the forces of the universe behind it, must be in the end the conqueror of all who rebel against it, and in the Gospel we are told that the ransom-price was the death of Christ, who gave Himself for us and suffered in our stead (1 Pet. i. 18). The ransom was sufficient (H. E. I. 377–381).

III. Apply the text experimentally to the Christian's deliverance from sin. 1. Jesus not only made atonement for our sins; He at the same time contended with and overcame our worst enemies. Man was the willing servant of the powers of darkness; not a forced captive, but a ready subject of Satan. But, by dying, Jesus overcame him who had dominion over our race (Heb. iv. 14, 15; Eph. iv. 8). He literally made good the promise, "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children."

2. In converting grace, the triumph is the same; and in the experience of the penitent sinner it is continually renewed (Luke iv. 18, xi. 20–22). Christ's people are pardoned and delivered from the power of sin in all its forms; in every conflict He gives them victory, and He will do so to the end

(Rom. vi. 14, viii. 37; H. E. I. 1099, 1106, 1112–1119).

IV. Apply it prospectively to the blessed resurrection from the dead promised to the people of God.—*Samuel Thodey.*

(a) "The lawful captive" has been rendered "the captive of the strong" (Herd.), of the stern or severe (Schult., Rosenm.), of the victorious (Mich., Beck), of the terrible, by a conjectural change of reading (Hitz., Lowth, Knob., Ewald), righteous captives, *i.e.*, exiled Jews (Symm., Jareh., Aben Ezra, Hitz., Hahn), the plunder of the righteous, *i.e.*, taken from them (Ges., Maurer, Umbreil). But the received version (Stier) gives the true meaning, "the captive of one who has a rightful claim to keep another in bondage." There is a climax, seldom noticed, in the reply; and a threefold gradation, of a simply rightful, a powerful, and a terrible conqueror; of one who has a just claim, one who has also power to maintain it, and one whose power is so terrible that resistance seems hopeless. Shall the prey of the mighty be taken away, or even a captive justly claimed, though by one less mighty, be delivered? Not in the common course of things, or by human justice alone. But God's grace has a higher law, and even more than this shall be done: the prey of the most terrible among Zion's adversaries shall be delivered.—*Birks.*

Both in providence and grace, "man's extremity is God's opportunity." Of this, the Jews needed to be reminded. They had been taken into captivity, and were detained there for the punishment of their sins. They had been assured that God would deliver them in due time, but the difficulties in the way of the fulfilment of that promise seemed so insuperable, that they despairingly asked, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" To this question Isaiah was authorised confidently to give a reassuring reply (ver. 25).

I. *To this question there was an answer in the deliverance of the Jewish people from the tyranny of Egypt.* The history of what God did for their fathers should have prevented the Jews in Babylon from asking this question. But in every new extremity men are prone to forget the history of the past.

II. *There was an answer to this question in the deliverance of the people of God from their captivity in Babylon.* It seemed impossible, but it was accomplished, and in precisely the manner that God had predicted. These things were written for our learning!

III. *There was an answer to this question in the great work of human redemption effected by Christ on the Cross.* That seemed the hour of Satan's victory; it was the hour of his defeat (Col. ii. 14, 15).

IV. *There are answers to this question in the conversion of sinners by the preaching of the Gospel.* The glorious work of emancipation still goes on (Luke iv. 18; 2 Cor. x. 4).

V. *There will be an answer to this question when our Redeemer returns with power and great glory.* Then death and the grave shall be compelled to give up their prey; and death and hell shall be "cast into the lake of fire."—*W. Dransfield: Forty-six Short Sermons*, pp. 239–264.

I. *The enemy to be encountered.* Satan, an enemy that is mighty and terrible. 1. In the nature of his influence. On the intellectual and moral man—the immortal soul. 2. In the number of his agents. A legion against one. 3. In the extent of his territory.

II. *The captives he retains.* 1. Those who are born where he reigns unrivalled. Idolatrous countries. 2. Those who yield to his sway, though deliverance is at hand. Pharisees Hardened sinners.

III. *The prospect of deliverance.* 1. The price of their redemption is provided. 2. The agent that can make it effective. 3. The means are in operation to make the deliverance known. 4. Specimens of triumph already obtained.

IV. *The means to be employed.* 1. Fervent and importunate prayer. 2. Free and extensive diffusion of the charter of liberty—"The Word of God."—*Studies for the Pulpit*, part ii. p. 308.

RESOURCES OF THE ADVERSARY, AND MEANS OF THEIR DESTRUCTION.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

xlix. 24, 25. *Thus saith the Lord, &c.*

The Scriptures teach that sin commenced its reign on earth under the auspices of a mighty fallen spirit; and that he, having seduced mankind from their allegiance to God, has constantly maintained his bad eminence over them. They also teach, that the Son of God has interposed to destroy the works of this spirit; and that He will accomplish the object; that the power of Satan shall be broken, and the whole world be restored to loyalty and the favour of heaven. Other passages allude to the success with which the enemy of God has fortified his cause; to its final overthrow; and to the exultation and joy with which the event will fill earth and heaven (chap. liii. 12; Luke xi. 21, 22; Rev. xi. 15, xix. 5, 6). An alienated world requires more moral power for its restoration than that of simple law, which proved insufficient to maintain its allegiance. It requires a new moral influence, so introduced and applied as to corroborate law, and strengthen the loyalty of all the good, while rebels are reconciled and pardoned. Consider—

I. THE WEAPONS AND RESOURCES OF THE ENEMY.

1. At the head of opposition to the Gospel, in numerical power, must be placed *idolatry.* To banish from the earth all knowledge of God and His government, and substitute a worship composed of lust and blood, seems most desirable to the great adversary, where circumstances allow it to be done; and this he has achieved in respect to about six hundred millions of the human family.

2. *Imposture.* This was introduced by Mahomed. It was a system accommodated to the condition of a mingled population, composed of Pagans, Jews, and nominal Christians, all in a state of great ignorance and deep moral debasement.

3. *Papal superstition.* This has been, and is still, the master-piece of that wisdom which is from beneath; concentrating the bad influence of all past systems. Popery is a system where science and ignorance, refinement and barbarism, wisdom and stupidity, taste and animalism, mistaken zeal and malignant enmity, may sanctimoniously pour out their virulence against the Gospel, and cry "Hosanna!" while they go forth to shed the blood and to wear out the patience of the saints.

4. The *despotic governments of the earth.*

5. *Crime in its varied forms.* A vast amount of capital is embarked in enterprises which, directly or indirectly, war against morality. All this, when the spirit of Christianity shall prevail, will be contraband, and be withdrawn.

6. *A more liberal sort of religion* which shall keep the opposition in countenance, and enable them to wield the name and institutions of Christianity against Christianity — including so much truth as may serve to beguile, but so little as cannot avail to save—sustained by such as live in pleasure, and will not bow the knee to Christ.

7. *The corruption of the purity of revivals of religion.* Terrible, by the power of revivals, as an army with banners, the victory of the Church is secure, unless fanaticism can be substituted for pure religion, and her compact masses be broken and scattered by the commotion of unhallowed passions within. In this manner was the glory of the Reformation eclipsed, and vital religion, in the time of Cromwell, made a scoff and a by-word. The same attempt was made in New England early in the days of our fathers. It was repeated in the time of Whitefield and the immortal Edwards, with lamentable, though with but partial success.

8. All these great divisions of systematic opposition to the Gospel have, where circumstances allowed, been sup

plemented by the *sword*. Christianity, in her first attempt to disenthrall the world, met the storms of ten persecutions, protracted through a period of three hundred years.

And now, can such varied and mighty resistance to the truth be overcome? Can the earth be enlightened? Can the nations be disenthralled? Can the whole creation, which has groaned and travailed together in pain until now, be brought out of bondage into glorious liberty? Yes; all this can be done, and *will* be done. Our next inquiry then is,

II. How shall events so desirable be accomplished?

1. By the judgments of heaven, in which the Son of man will come upon the strong man armed and take away his armour. 2. By the universal propagation of the Gospel; before the light of which, idolatry, imposture, and superstition, will retreat abashed. 3. By frequent, and at last, general revivals of religion; giving resistless power to the Gospel, as it is preached to every creature. 4. By the special influence of the Holy Spirit. The simple presence of Christianity would no more convert the heathen, than it converts those where it already exists. Were every family on earth now blessed with a Bible and a pastor, these, without the effusion of the Spirit, would not maintain upon the earth an uncorrupt, nominal Christianity for one hundred years. 5. By a new and unparalleled vigour of Christian enterprise. Until then, the Church will have been the assailed party, and stood upon the defensive; but thenceforth the word of command will not be "Stand," but "*March.*" The gates of the holy city will be thrown open; the tide of war will be rolled upon the enemy; and one shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight. The means and efforts for evangelising the world must correspond, however, with the magnitude of the result. The idea that God will convert the heathen in His own good time, and that Christians have nothing to do but to pray and devoutly wait, is found in no canonical book. From the beginning the cause of God on earth has been maintained and carried forward only by the most heroic exertion. Christianity, even in the age of miracles, was not propagated but by stupendous efforts. And it is only by a revival of primitive zeal and enterprise that the glorious things spoken of the city of our God can be accomplished.

But what can be done? There must be in the church of God—1. More faith. 2. More intense love for Christ. 3. More decided action. 4. More courage. 5. New and more vigorous efforts to increase the number and power of evangelical churches in our lands. 6. Special effort is required to secure to the rising generation an education free from the influence of bad example, and more decidedly evangelical. 7. The vigour of charitable effort must be greatly increased. 8. The jealousies of Christians who are united substantially in their views of evangelical doctrine and religion, and who are divided only by localities, and rites, and forms, must yield, and give place to the glorious exigencies of the present day. 9. We must guard against the dangers peculiar to a state of religious prosperity.

Conclusion.—Will any of you, in this glorious day, take side against the cause of Christ? It will be a fearful experiment. And woe unto him who contendeth with his Maker!—*Lyman Beecher, D.D.: Missionary Enterprise*, pp. 121–142. (*Boston Edition.*)

The Safety of the Church.

xlix. 25. *And all flesh shall know, &c.*

I. *God is the protector of the Church, and no weapons formed against her shall prosper.* The efforts which have been made to destroy the Church of God have been vain. Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness, in Babylon, and under Antiochus Epiphanes. The early persecutions of the Christians in Judea,

in the Roman Empire. The persecution of the Waldenses in Switzerland; of the Huguenots in France; and of the Reformers in England. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against her" (H. E. I. 1246–1251).

II. *The Church's enemies shall be distracted in their counsels, and left to anarchy and overthrow.* God will fill the ranks of His foes with confusion, and suffer them to be torn and distracted with internal strifes.

III. *The Church shall rise resplendent from all her persecutions, and shall prosper ultimately, just in proportion to their efforts to destroy it.* The effect of all shall be the diffusion of the Gospel among all nations, and to bring all men to acknowledge that He who thus protects His Church is the true and only God—the Saviour, the Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.—*Adapted from Barnes' Commentary.*

Salvation for the Little Ones.

xlix. 25. *I will save thy children.*

This promise of salvation for the children has made the heart of many a pious parent thrill with delight. "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice." In fact, worldly and even wicked parents are often glad to see their children religious. They admire and approve in them that religion which they know, to their sorrow, they are neglecting themselves. If an appeal were made to the adult members of an ordinary congregation as to whether a minister ought to urge religion upon the attention of children, all as with one voice would respond, "By all means try to save the little ones." This blessed promise, "I will save thy children," will be regarded by such as one of the most precious in the Bible.

I. To whom this precious promise is made. The verses which cluster around it possess more than common interest. They depict scenes radiant with the glory of Zion's successes and triumphs. In the midst of all these glorious triumphs, this heart-cheering promise comes in, "and *I will save thy children.*"

Viewing those words in the light thrown upon them by these surroundings, may we not safely say, This is a part of the heritage of God's Church? And are we not to expect that the Lord will fulfil His promise in a special manner at a time when His church is reviving and multiplying? Is not the salvation of the children here placed before us as the crowning glory of Christ's Church, when she is in the full tide of her prosperity? Is it not made to *you*, and on behalf of *your children?*

Let each pious parent at once put in his claim, "Lord, Thou hast specially promised to save my children; now fulfil Thy gracious word. Let me see them holy, useful, and happy here; let me hereafter meet them in heaven. According to Thy word, I look for this. While I pray, watch, and work for the salvation of my children, I am expecting Thee to verify the truth of Thy promise and to save them." Those parents who connect with this spirit of prayerful expectation a godly and winsome example, will soon see their children happy in God.

II. Let us try to realise, if we can, its full import. The word "*save,*" when linked to the souls of our children, is indeed "a gem of purest ray serene." Its price is above rubies. Who can fathom its import? And who can rightly realise the terrible antithesis, one's child *unsaved?* capable of conversion, old enough to understand and experience real religion, and yet UNSAVED! Illustrate the spiritual condition of such. (α)

Save! Nothing less than the unsearchable riches of Christ. Health for the soul, complete liberty from the bondage of sin, "the glorious liberty of the children of God." These four

letters SAVE include "the gift of God," which is "eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This promise specially belongs to God's own people. Does not this furnish one of the strongest reasons why unconverted parents should seek religion? How sacred and solemn is the parental relationship! Every child is a fallen, though a redeemed, sinner; and each will be saved or lost for ever. Yet how few unsaved parents think of the eternal ruin that thus threatens their own children.—*G. A. Page.*

(a) Let us picture to our minds a child very poor, dreadfully diseased, and miserably enslaved. Every right-hearted parent is distressed to see his child poor, clad in rags, bedded on straw, pale and pinched with hunger. Add to poverty, disease: the rosy bloom has disappeared from the cheek. The little frame is wasting to a skeleton. Life is a burden, and the grave is opening to entomb your fondest hopes. Add to poverty and disease, slavery: your child the property of another, who claims him as his own and subjects him to all the degradation and misery of a galling servitude! What would be your feelings as a parent had you a child in such circumstances as these? Methinks it would be enough to make your life a burden. Have you a child unsaved? Then is he not poor? miserably poor? Has not sin robbed him of peace and purity? Does it not threaten to rob him of heaven and hope? Is not your unsaved child diseased? full of the leprosy of sin? sick unto death? Does not Satan bind his captive soul "fast in his slavish chains?" Is he not held in the most cruel bondage by the worst of tyrants? You know that all this is true, that it is no over-coloured picture. In fact, it is only part of the truth. Your unsaved child is under sentence of death. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." That sentence might be executed by Divine justice at any moment. What then is to become of your poor, diseased, enslaved, and doomed child?—*Page.*

SINFUL ISRAEL SELF-RUINED.

l. 1–3. *Thus saith the Lord, Where is the hill, &c.*

Those who have professed to be the people of God, and yet seem to be severely dealt with, are apt to complain of God, and to lay the fault upon Him, as if He had severely dealt with them. But, in answer to their murmurings, we have here—

I. A CHALLENGE TO PRODUCE ANY EVIDENCE THAT THE QUARREL BEGAN ON GOD'S SIDE (ver. 1). They could not say that He had done them any wrong, or had acted arbitrarily. 1. He had been a Husband to them; and husbands were then allowed to put away their wives upon any little disgust (Deut. xxiv. 1; Matt. xix. 7). But they could not say that God had dealt so with them; true, they were now separated from Him, but whose fault was that? What evidence could they produce that He had dealt with them capriciously? 2. He had been a Father to them; and fathers had then a power to sell their children for slaves to their creditors; and they were then sold to the Babylonians, as they were afterwards to the Romans; but did God sell them for payment of His debts? When God chastens His children, it is neither for His pleasure nor His profit (Heb. xii. 10).

II. A CHARGE THAT THEY WERE THEMSELVES THE AUTHORS OF THEIR RUIN. "Behold, for your iniquities," &c.

III. A CONFIRMATION OF THIS CHALLENGE AND THIS CHARGE (vers. 2, 3).

1. It was plain that it was their own fault that they were cast off, for God came and offered them His helping hand, either to prevent their trouble, or to deliver them out of it, but they slighted Him and all the tenders of His grace (ver. 2; Matt. xxi. 34; Jer. xxxv. 15). He called to them to leave their sins, and so prevent their own ruin; but there was no man, or next to none, that complied with the messages He sent them: and it was for this that they were sold and put away (2 Chron. xxxvi. 16, 17). Last of all, He sent unto them His Son, who would have gathered Jerusalem's children together, but they would not; and for that transgression it was that they were put away, and their house left desolate (Matt. xxi. 41, xxiii. 37,

38; Luke xix. 41, 42). When God calls men to happiness, and they will not answer, they are justly left to be miserable.

2. It was plain that it was not owing to any lack of power in God that they were led into the misery of captivity and remained in it, for He is almighty. They lacked faith in Him, and so that power was not exerted on their behalf. So it is with sinners still.—*Matthew Henry; Commentary, in loco.*

I. A picture of the sinner's miserable condition! separated from God—sold under sin. II. The occasion of it: not the will of God—but his own love of sin—and his consequent disregard of God's offers of deliverance from sin and sorrow.—*J. Lyth, D.D.: The Homiletical Treasury: Isaiah*, p. 69.

The Teacher of the Weary.

l. 2–4. *Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, &c.*

For the young, this is fresh, beautiful, sunlit life; to the old, it is often what Talleyrand found it, who in the journal of his eighty-third year, wrote "Life is a long fatigue." The first cry of a soul when Divinely wakened to its true condition is after a Teacher, who in a way suited to its weakness will teach it secrets suited to its wants. Such a Teacher has been found for us all, and the "words in season that He speaks are the 'words of eternal life.'" Listen to this Teacher, for He is speaking to us now. He speaks in the style of God. Beginning, "Thus saith the Lord" (ver. 1), He at once announces His Divinity. He then goes on to speak of Himself as a man (vers. 5, 6). These words, therefore, could have been spoken alone by the Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. They place before our thoughts—

I. His Divine power and glory.

Power is naturally calm. Yet perhaps a storm will make a child think of power more than the sunshine will. Knowing our frame, our Teacher seeks to impress us with a sense of His power by bidding us think of Him as working by inexorable force certain awful changes and displacements in nature; "I dry up the sea," &c. One day, with a casual blow of his hammer, Hugh Miller laid open a block in a quarry, and there discovered a fossil fish, supposed to be the first of its own variety ever seen by mortal. There it lay, "*dried up*" (α), turned into a thing of stone. Whose work was this? Christ's name is traced in sacred cypher on the foundations of the lasting hills; *He* dried up the sea; *He* made the river a wilderness, &c. It is a joy to think that the power so mighty to destroy is now all mediatorial.

II. His human life and education.

The Lord not only became a man, but assumed humanity in its humblest form; an apostle says, "He emptied Himself." Gradually, it seems (Luke ii. 40, 52), the Divine Spirit, like a mysterious Voice, woke up within Him the consciousness of what He was, and of what He had come on earth to fulfil; morning by morning (ver. 4) the Voice was ever wakening Him to a higher consciousness and more awful knowledge; nor was His equipment complete until He uttered His last cry from the cross (H. E. I. 858–863).

III. The mediatorial teaching for which He had been thus prepared.

1. *It is personal.* If His own personal teaching had not been in view, there would have been no need for all this personal preparation. "The Lord hath given *Me* the tongue of the learned," &c. The education of a human soul is not to be entrusted to any created being. A million messengers may bring us wisdom, but

Christ is the Personal Agent who employs them all. "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man."

2. *It is suitable;* "that I should know how to speak a word in season." Suitable to our weariness (1.) *while we are yet in a state of unregeneracy.* Christ knows how to speak to such so as to kindle sympathy and waken response; He knows how to speak a word that gives life, the only "word in season" to men "dead in trespasses and sins." (2.) *When we are sinking under the burden of guilt.* The law of God demands a perfect obedience; you are unable to meet that demand. All the while Christ was on earth, He was learning how to take that burden from you (Heb. v. 8). (3.) *When we are fainting under the burden of care.* When you are ready to learn, Christ is ready to teach (Ps. lv. 22). To cast your burden upon the Lord is to cast *yourself* upon Him—yourself, with all you carry. (4.) *When we are burdened under the intellectual mysteries of theology.* Such difficulties form an essential part of the Christian discipline of many. Those who feel them are tempted, on the one hand, to rest in the authority of human reason, and, on the other, in the authority of the Church. But, who can teach us so surely the things that relate to Christ, as Christ Himself? Christ, wise in His speech, and wise in His silence, may not give us all the knowledge we wish for, but He will give us all we need. (5.) *When we are under the burden of mortal infirmity.* "The faint old man sits down by the wayside a-weary." At first he thought within himself—

> 'I am a useless hull, 'tis time I sunk;
> I am in all men's ways, I trouble them,
> I am a trouble to myself."

But Christ has spoken to his soul, and dispersed those sad imaginations, by the power of thoughts that renew his inward strength (ch. xl. 29–31). There sits a man who was once an active thinker; but he has just tried to read one of his own books, and could not understand it. When other teachers have gone their way, Christ comes, and says, "Learn of Me" (Matt. xi. 28–30).

3. *It is minutely direct and particular.* The Good Shepherd "calleth His own sheep *by name*, and leadeth them out;" "the Master is come, and calleth for *thee*."

> "Thou art as much His care as if beside
> Nor man nor angel lived in all the earth;
> The sunbeams pour alike their glorious tide
> To light a world, or wake an insect's birth:
> They shine and shine with unexhausted store;
> Thou art thy Saviour's darling—seek no more."

Solomon calls wisdom a "tree of life;" and the heavenly Teacher's wisdom is like the mystical tree of life, bearing "twelve manner of fruits, and yielding her fruit every month." You can never go to that tree out of season; you can never go to it seeking fruit and finding none; for as one has said, "you carry with you the season, and make it the season of the tree."—*C. Stanford, D.D., Symbols of Christ*, pp. 146–172.

(a) For חבאש, *stinketh*, read חיבש, *is dried up;* so it stands in the Bodleian MS., and it is confirmed by the LXX, ξηρανθησονται, —*Lowth.*

He who speaks is the second person of the ever blessed Trinity; He speaks in that character of a *Mediator* which He had covenanted from all eternity to bear, and which required that in "the fulness of time" He should be made flesh, and dwell among men. This is the explanation of the mystery that He who in one verse speaks as God (verse 3), in the next describes Himself as a learner. *How* the man Christ Jesus became informed of the nature and obligations of the mediatorial office is a profound mystery; all that we are told is, that it was *gradually* (Luke ii. 52; H. E. I. 858–863), so that morning by morning something new was told, till at last the whole

task of labour, ignominy, and death, lay spread before the view of the Surety of our race. But though we may not be able to penetrate the mystery of the process, the result was that our Lord entered upon His mission possessing "the tongue of the learned." Not according to any anticipation that the "learned" men of the world would have favoured, if this prediction had been made known to them. *His* was the profounder and more important knowledge of the human heart; and therefore He was able to do what all their wisdom and science would never have enabled them to accomplish, He knew how to speak words in season to the weary. He has been the great Comforter of our race. Millions burdened by sin and sorrow have been helped and strengthened by Him.

In this respect His ministers should strive to be like Him. Intellectual culture they are not to disregard, but their supreme ambition should be to attain to such a knowledge of the heart, in all its varying experiences, and of the adaptation of God's truth thereto, that they also may know how to speak words in season to the weary—right words at the right time.—*Henry Melvill, B.D: Sermons Preached on Public Occasions*, pp. 125–147.

The text is a word for the weary from One in whose sympathy the human heart finds its refreshment and strength. In the work of cheering weary hearts, Christ excels immeasurably all others. God, who gave to Moses the tongue of terror, and to Isaiah the tongue of a fellow-sufferer with God's people, has given to Christ, in a singular and incomparable sense, the tongue of one who has drunk our cup, navigated all the seas of our experience, and become one with us in all that pertains to human suffering and conflict. *Christ has the tongue of experience.* Robertson strains language when he speaks of the "human heart of God." But we may speak of the human sympathy of "the man Christ Jesus"—the "Son of God." His human heart has experienced human woes — toil, weariness, disappointment, sorrow, and curse. He was made in all things like His brethren, to assure us of God's sympathy. Not that God knows our suffering the more familiarly, or sympathises with us the more tenderly, because He has experienced them in our nature. His omniscience marks the quiver of each heart-pang. His sympathy is as abounding and deep as the ocean, for "God is love." But we cannot conceive adequately of the sympathy of an abstract First Cause. Roman Catholics are right when they tell us that we can only realise God's acquaintance and sympathy with human sorrow as we look at a human fellow-sufferer possessing the most susceptible of tender human hearts. Their error is in pointing us to the Virgin Mother instead of the Incarnate Son. Because Christ has the tongue of experience, therefore His sympathy is the more effective. Apply these thoughts to—

1. *Physical sufferings.* Christ's experience of hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, &c. (vers. 5, 6). Christ has imparted a new meaning to all God's assurances in the Old Testament, and given existence and force to all the consolations of the New, since they all are God's, and God is Christ. Listen to the tongue of experience as it becomes the tongue of sympathy (Ps. ciii. 13; 2 Cor. iv. 17; Heb. ii. 10, 14).

2. *Temptations.* Some say that since Christ could not have yielded, therefore He had no true experience of conflict with evil. But can you say, that because the steadfast Christian is so full of Christ that he cannot allow himself to sin, therefore he has no true experience of conflict? In point of fact, the victor knows the cost of withstanding temptation far more than he who is vanquished by it (Heb. iv. 15, ii. 18). Christ has fought His way to victory all along our path, and the way of holiness is crimson with His blood. Read the answers given by Christ (Matt. iv.), and remember that He learnt to speak them in a conflict

severer far than yours, that you may hear them clear and sure above the din and clangour of your sharpest contests with self and sin (H. E. I. 866–871).

3. *The derision of the world.* Many times was He reviled and scorned; while in John's Gospel we read of six most determined attempts on the part of His foes to do their worst. Realise all the sympathy which Christ conveys when He tells us that we suffer these things "for His name's sake."

4. *The treachery of friends.* Christ's experience of the desertion of His disciples, and the betrayal of Judas. Let all deceived hearts dwell restfully upon the assurance (Heb. xiii. 5).

5. *The impenitence of sinners.* The praying father or mother, weary of the son's or daughter's impenitence. Christ wept over Jerusalem, and then went down into the city to die for her. His heart still melts with tenderness.

6. *Bereavement* (John xi.) In weeping with them, He has wept with us. In raising Himself, He has shown all mourners that He will raise again the dead (John xi. 25, 26). A word in season for you.

7. *Divine sovereignty.* How many perplexed brains and weary hearts there are by reason of the mystery of God's dealings! It seems strange that God's Son should be called upon to experience this perplexity and weariness, till we hear Him cry, "If it be possible," &c., and, "O my God! my God! why hast *Thou* forsaken me?" But His experience only makes God's word the more assuring, that the Providence that upholds the sparrow, counts our hairs, and attends our every step, will order all things well (Rom. viii. 28).

The value of the text is not so much that Christ suffered this or that, as that He suffered *so deeply* (Heb. v. 7, 8, ii. 18). The thoroughness of Christ's experience (Isa. l. 5). No sun ever rose upon His daily path, but it revealed some fresh experience of human toil, conflict, trial, or sorrow. So it is with us. But every sun that rises on *our* daily path, lights it with a fadeless ray, revealing, parallel with our life, the experience of Him who has tabernacled in our flesh, and who speaks to our hearts in the fulfilment of a ministry of sympathy, in which He has no rival.

CONCLUSION.—Those who go in the way which they light up for themselves can only have sorrow and darkness (ver. 11). But those whose way is lit up by His love, who obey and follow, trust and love Him, as sheep their shepherd, shall have no darkness, but their sorrow shall flee away and God Himself shall comfort and refresh them. —*David Arundell Hay.*

GOD'S REBUKE OF UNBELIEF, AND CHALLENGE TO FAITH.

l. 2. *Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?*

It was not because God was unable to deliver them, that His ancient people had been led away as captives, but solely on account of their sins (ver. 1, &c.) But He wished them to realise the fact that notwithstanding their sins, in virtue of His possession of unlimited power He could easily fulfil His promises of deliverance. We, too, need to realise more distinctly this fundamental truth—God's almighty and unchangeable power. Know it we do, but we often do not *realise* it. We often act as though we really believed that the Lord's power had diminished. Our text rebukes our unbelief, and challenges our faith. It may be used—

I. TO STIMULATE THE CHURCH IN THE PROSECUTION OF HER MISSION. Her mission is to save—instrumentally to save the world. But her success is small when compared with the multiplied agencies employed, &c. Is the Lord's hand shortened at all? No. His purpose and His power are unchanged. Early triumphs of Christianity—Pentecost, &c. His hand has

been with His Church wherever there has been *believing* prayer and effort. It is this that is lacking: not prayer and effort, but *believing* prayer and effort. It is unbelief that shortens God's hand, and it only (Matt. xiii. 58). (α)

II. TO COMFORT THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

1. *In seasons of providential trial.* Such seasons are common. But God has engaged to support or deliver His people whatever may be the nature of the trial through which they are passing. He is equal to every emergency. Rely upon the promises of God. He *has* sustained, comforted, and delivered, and He *will*. Faith argues from the past to the present and the future (1 Sam. xvii. 34–37; Ps. lxiii. 7; 2 Cor. i. 8–10; 2 Tim. iv. 17, 18). "Walk on the waters of trial by a living faith, and you shall find them solid as marble beneath your feet. Hang upon the simple power and providence of God, and you shall never be confounded."

2. *In seasons of doubt and fear in relation to their final salvation.* God's people are sometimes doubtful and desponding respecting their eternal safety. When they contemplate the difficulties and dangers, the temptations and the snares that beset their path, heaven seems to be an uncertain inheritance, and they are ready to conclude they shall never reach its happiness and glory. Opposed to them stands the power of Satan; the allurements of the world, the forces of evil within, the cares and afflictions of life, &c. But we have *promises* and *examples* that are calculated to dissipate every doubt and to banish every fear that we shall not eventually triumph. Abraham, Job, David, Paul, &c. Divine grace has been, and still is, all-sufficient (H. E. I. 1066, 2363–2377).

III. TO ENCOURAGE THE ANXIOUS INQUIRER. Though desirous to be saved, many are full of doubts and difficulties and questionings. There is nothing that appears so difficult to a convinced sinner as his own salvation. But the question is not whether you can save yourself, but whether GOD can save you. You know *He* can. Every *moral* difficulty has been removed by His infinite love in the gift of His Son, &c. True, you have broken the divine law, &c., but Christ has honoured and fulfilled it, as your substitute and representative, &c. Therefore the forgiveness of sin is consonant with God's righteousness as well as His mercy (Rom. iii. 24–26). Nor can there be any effectual opposition made by *Satan* to the sinner's rescue. He is mighty, but Christ is almighty—"Able to save to the uttermost, &c."—*Alfred Tucker.*

(α) There is nothing too hard for God. When we look at the human side of the question, difficulties and obstacles rise on every hand, and hedge our way and hinder our progress; and if our view is only a human view, we sink discouraged and dismayed. But if, on the other hand, we will take a look at the Divine side of the question, how soon our fears vanish, and our difficulties disperse! With God all things are possible, and the faith that takes hold upon His arm partakes of His omnipotence.

There are many things which men have done that seemed impossible at the first. The power of mechanical or chemical forces, directed by scientific intelligence, exceeds by far the bounds of ordinary belief; but when we pass from this sphere into that upper realm where the Almighty rules and presides, surely nothing is beyond the reach of His almighty hand!

Hence, in estimating possibilities or probabilities of success in any course, it is for us to inquire first of all, What is the will of God concerning the matter? Does He undertake the cause? Is He upon the side of its success? Are we doing His will rather than our own? If the work we undertake is His work, and if He has appointed us to do it, we may move on in all the calmness of a living faith, without one doubt or fear, knowing that He "who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" can give us victory. The thing which God wishes to be done *can* be done, and, if we will be workers with Him, *shall* be done, for neither men nor devils can restrain the arm of our wonder-working God. Let us, then, have courage, and banish fear. Let us work the works of God, confident that our labour will not be fruitless, and that our victory is assured by Him before the fight begins.—*A. T.*

The Power of God.

l. 2, 3. *Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, &c.*

There are other declarations of like purport in the prophecies of Isaiah (ch. li. 9, 10, 15, lxiii. 11–13). They speak to us of Divine power. The mighty works referred to could not be performed by any false god. The deliverance of God's ancient people from Egypt was attended with such amazing miracles, and with such a sudden destruction of their foes, that none but an Almighty Being could have performed it.

I. Let us attempt with reverent humility to form some conception of the nature of God's power (H. E. I. 2269–2274).

1. The power of God is that ability or strength, whereby He can do whatever He pleases—whatever His infinite wisdom directs, and the perfect purity of His will resolves (ch. xlvi. 10; Ps. cxv. 3). It is almost superfluous to say that the Almighty cannot do anything which implies or involves a contradiction, nor anything repugnant to His own perfections, either in relation to Himself or to His creatures, &c.

2. The power of God gives activity to all the other perfections of His nature. "God hath a powerful wisdom to attain His ends without interruption, a powerful mercy to remove our misery, a powerful justice to punish offenders, a powerful truth to perform all His promises."

3. This power is originally and essentially in His nature—underived. "Power belongeth to God." "He is the Source, Centre, Assemblage of all the might that is; containing in Himself the unfathomable depths of Omnipotence, as of Being."

4. It follows that the power of God is infinite. Nothing can be too difficult for the Divine power to effect (Gen. xviii. 14). A power which cannot be opposed (Dan. iv. 35).

II. Let us view with reverent astonishment the manifestations of God's power.

1. In creation. "Examine individuals, systems, worlds beyond worlds, scattered in boundless profusion through the wide realm of space. They sprang forth at His voice, and they are sustained by the hand of God. All are 'vouchers of Omnipotence!'" (Gen. i. 3; Ps. viii. 34; Isa. xlii. 5, 8, &c.) Pythagoras called those fools, who denied the power of God.

2. In the government of the world. (1.) In *natural* government, or preservation. God is the great Father of the universe, to nourish as well as create it (Ps. xxxvi. 6). He keeps all the strings of nature in tune, &c. (2.) In *moral* government—restraining the malice of Satan and the wickedness of man, &c. (3.) In His *gracious* government—delivering His Church, effecting His great and glorious purposes by the simplest means, &c.

3. In the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, and in suspending or reversing the usual laws of nature on special occasions. These are the hidings of God's power. Submissive nature yields and obeys (Ps. cxiv. 5–7).

4. In the work of our redemption by Jesus Christ. Our Saviour is called "the power of God." His incarnation, miracles, resurrection, &c.; the publication of redemption by such feeble instruments; the wonderful success of their ministry.

5. In the conviction and conversion of sinners, the perseverance of His people amidst all the temptations and afflictions to which they are exposed.

III. Let us consider with prayerful concern the practical lessons which this subject teaches.

1. The fear of God (Jer. v. 22, &c.) If God be against us, it matters not who they be that are for us. "Fear Him," therefore, "who hath power to cast into hell." "On this ground, as well as on the ground of His other perfections, we should bow before Him with lowly reverence, and while we

tremble to place ourselves in an attitude of antagonism to Him, we should seek His favour, protection, and blessing." Confidence in God amid all the conflicts and afflictions of this probationary state. All needful assistance and comfort, &c., will be vouchsafed (2 Cor. ix. 8; Eph. iii. 20).

2. The assurance that all His plans and purposes will be finally accomplished (Ps. xxxvii. 5).

"Engraved as in eternal brass,
The mighty promise shines;
Nor can the powers of darkness raze
Those everlasting lines," &c.

—*Alfred Tucker.*

The Appeal of Almighty Power.

1. 2, 3. *Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? &c.*

Review the circumstances under which this appeal was addressed to sinful Israel of old. The principles of Divine truth and religion the same under all dispensations.

I. The Lord comes and calls sinners to repentance, but they do not regard Him.

1. *He does this in manifold ways.* (1.) By the voice of conscience. Representative of the supreme law—inward monitor, &c., ever urging the abandonment of the sinful and the adoption of the true and pure, &c. (2.) By the events of Providence. The whole system of Providence is in operation for none other than religious ends and purposes. Mercies are sent to allure, judgments to alarm (H. E. I. 56–59, 66–70). (3.) By His Word. The Bible is God speaking to man, &c. Everywhere it calls to repentance, &c. (4.) By His ministers. He speaks to man, by man. Samuel thought it was only the voice of Eli that called him, but it was God's voice. The true minister is God's ambassador (2 Cor. v. 18–20). (5.) By His Son. "His servant"—the Saviour, so often introduced in these prophecies with dramatic directness, as speaking in His own name (Matt. xxi. 37; John i. 10, 11; Acts iii. 13; Heb. i. 1). (6.) By His Spirit. Speaking to the ear of the inner man by the ministries of friendship, or the incidents and intercourse of common life; by sickness, &c., stirring up an unwonted anxiety about the things which belong to our peace. Though He has been treated so shamefully, He still speaks, strives, pleads, &c.

2. *But sinners do not regard Him.* As of old, they heed not the Divine calls, they slight His gracious offers, they reject the messages sent, &c., as unworthy their regard, &c.

II. The Lord gives astonishing proof of His ability and willingness to save, yet sinners do not believe it, and trust in Him. "Behold, at my rebuke," &c. He who by His mere threatening word has dried up the sea, and turned rivers into a hard and barren soil, so that the fishes putrefy for want of water, and eclipsed the lights of heaven, can with infinite ease come with a gospel of deliverance from sin and punishment. He can perform stupendous miracles of *grace*—save sinners to the very "uttermost." No limit can be set to His omnipotent grace.

Yet sinners will not believe it. Like a condemned criminal who will not believe even when he sees the Queen's pardon. If sinners will not believe God's Gospel, how can they be saved? We may as well expect a man to be fed by bread that he will not eat, or to be cured by medicine that he will not take, as expect a man to be saved by a Gospel that he will not believe.

Or *they neglect it.* Like the old miser who is so busy with his ledgers and gold bags that he does not heed the alarm of fire, and therefore perishes. So with the worldling. We tell them of danger and of salvation, but they are so busy, &c., they

just leave the matter alone — they neglect it.

Or *they despise it.* Like a poor but proud man who despises relief when offered, because he must go and receive it as a gift. If sinners could take their little, petty, paltry doings and *buy* God's salvation, they would have it, but because they must have it as a *gift*, they will not receive it.

III. The Lord justly complains that He is thus disregarded and doubted. "Wherefore," &c.? Not the language of anger, but sorrowful lament, wounded friendship, grieved love, &c. As a faithful father, &c. A just complaint. Such conduct is manifestly unreasonable, shamefully ungrateful, exceedingly sinful, imminently dangerous, &c. (Prov. i. 26). It keeps back the blessings which God is ready to confer. It is highly dishonouring to God. It disputes the Divine Word, rejects the clearest evidence, limits the Omnipotent One, &c. Think of this. Hear and obey the Divine call. "Repent and believe the Gospel." If you reject it, the responsibility rests upon you, and you must give account to God.—*Alfred Tucker.*

The Solar Eclipse.

I. 3. *I clothe the heavens with blackness, &c.*

If there be sermons in stones, there must be a great sermon in the sun; and if there be books in the running brooks, no doubt there is many a huge volume to be found in a sun suffering eclipse. All things teach us, if we have but a mind to learn. Let us see whether this may not lead us into a train of thought which may, under God's blessing, be something far better to us than the seeing of an eclipse.

I. Eclipses of every kind are part of God's way of governing the world. In olden times the ignorant people in England were frightened at an eclipse; they could not understand what it meant. They were quite sure that there was about to be a war, or a famine, or a terrible fire, &c. So it still is in the East. By many an eclipse is looked upon as something contrary to the general law of nature. But eclipses are as much a part of nature's laws as the regular sunshine; an eclipse is a necessary consequence of the natural motion of the moon and the earth around the sun, &c. Other eclipses happen in God's providence and in God's grace. Here, as in nature, an eclipse is part of God's plan, and is in fact involved in it.

1. Let me invite your attention to *providence at large.* How many times have we seen providence itself eclipsed with regard to the whole race, as it sends a flood, famine, war, plague, &c. It is just the same with you in *your own private concerns.* When you were rejoicing in the brightness of your light, on a sudden a mid-day midnight has fallen upon you; to your horror and dismay you are made to say, "Whence does all this evil come upon me? Is this also sent of God?" Most assuredly it is. Your penury, sickness, bereavement, contempt, all these things are as much ordained for you, and settled in the path of providence, as your wealth, comfort, and joy. Think not that God has changed. It involves no change of the sun when an eclipse overshadows it. Troubles must come; afflictions must befall; it must needs be that for a season ye should be in heaviness through manifold temptations.

2. Eclipses also occur in *grace.* Man was originally pure and holy; that is what God's grace will make him at last. Some of you are in the eclipse to-day. I hear you crying, "O that it were with me as in months past," &c. You are apt to say, "Is this a part of God's plan with me? Can this be the way in which God would bring me to heaven?" Yes, it is even so. In God's great plan of grace to the *world*, it is just the same. Sometimes we see a mighty reformation rising in the Church. God raises up

men who lead the van of the armies of Jehovah. A few more years and these reformers are dead, and their mantle has not fallen upon any, &c. Think not that eclipses of our holy religion, or the failure of great men in the midst of us, or the decline of piety, is at all apart from God's plan; it is involved in it, and as God's great purpose, moving in the circle, to bring forth another gracious purpose on earth must be accomplished, so an eclipse must necessarily follow, being involved in God's very way of governing the world in His grace.

II. **Everything that God does has a design.** When God creates light or darkness He has a reason for it. He does not always tell us His reason. We call Him a sovereign God, because sometimes He acts from reasons which are beyond our knowledge, but He is never an unreasoning God. I cannot tell you what is God's design in eclipsing the sun; I do not know of what use it is to the world. It may be, &c. However, we are not left in any darkness about other kinds of eclipses; we are quite certain that providential eclipses, and gracious eclipses, have both of them their reasons. When God sends a *providential* eclipse He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men for nought. It is to draw our attention to Himself. Doubtless, we should entirely forget God, if it were not for some of those eclipses which now and then happen. Sometimes troublous times tend to prepare the world for something better afterwards. War is an awful thing; but, I doubt not, it purges the moral atmosphere, just as a hurricane sweeps away a pestilence. It is a fearful thing to hear of famine or plague; but each of these things has some effect upon the human race. And evil generally goes to make room for a greater good. God has sent thee providential trouble. He has a gracious design in it. Many men are brought to Christ by trouble. Eclipses of *grace* have also their end and design. Why has God hidden His face from you? It is that you may begin to search yourself, and say, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me" (H. E. I. 1644–1648). God's people are afflicted in order that they may not go astray (H. E. I. 66–70, 190–194).

III. **As all things that God has created, whether they be light or whether they be dark, have a sermon for us, no doubt there are some sermons to be found in this eclipse.** What is it that hides the sun from us during an eclipse? It is the moon. She has borrowed all her light from the sun month after month; she would be a black blot if the sun did not shine upon her, and now she goes before his face, and prevents his light from shining upon us. Do you know anything at all like that in your own history? Have you not a great many comforts which you enjoy upon earth that are just like the moon? They borrow all their light from the sun, &c. Oh, how ungrateful we are when we let our comforts get before our God! No wonder that we get an eclipse then.

1. Let the Christian recollect another sermon. The sun is always the same, and God is unchangeable.

> "My soul through many changes goes,
> His love no variation knows."

2. A total eclipse is one of the most terrific and grand sights that ever will be seen. If on a sudden the sun should set in tenfold darkness, and never should rise again, what a horrid world this would be! And then the thought strikes me—Are not there some men, and are there not some here, who will one day have a total eclipse of all their comforts? Whatever eclipse happens to a Christian, it is never a total eclipse: there is always a crescent of love and mercy to shine upon him. But mark thee, sinner when thou comest to die, bright though thy joys be now, and fair thy prospects, thou wilt suffer a total eclipse. Can you guess what the Saviour meant, when He said "outer darkness, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth?" Hear me while I tell thee the way of salvation.—*C. H. Spurgeon: The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 183.

HUMAN WEARINESS: THE VARIETY OF ITS SOURCES, AND THE ONE SOURCE OF RELIEF FROM IT.

L. 4. *The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.*

There are many causes of weariness and sadness; as many as there are sources of cheerfulness and vigour in body and mind.

1. *Wounded affections.* When the seat of our pleasant emotions and sweet affections becomes filled with bitterness, we cannot wonder that exhaustion of energy should ensue, and the strong man be bowed down! Few who have advanced far in life, but have been thus attacked in the tenderest part of their being; and the power of resistance decreases as youth is left behind. Many, most dear, have vanished from the scene; former friends have perhaps lifted up the heel against us. We do not know, until the blow comes, how heavily we have been leaning on the staff of friendly sympathy. But amidst all our heart-troubles, the voice of the Saviour—deeply learned in the sorrows of humanity—is heard saying, "Rest!" "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." The words are words of authority, and of comfort because of their authority.

2. *Disappointment of our desires.* All are furnished with larger appetites than they have ability or opportunity for satisfying them. Pleasure! Money! Power! Reputation! Desire outruns our slow and pausing faculties. And this is a great cause of fatigue; we cannot keep up with ourselves, one part of our nature lags behind another. Again, the goal of our desire is ever receding. What an interesting picture does Ecclesiastes give of this universal experience! But in this mood, too, we are met by the Divine Saviour; for Christ would fill the soul with the only object of desire that cannot disappear in its grasp; with the Eternal Himself.

3. *Vacancy of mind and the sense of monotony.* "Nature abhors a vacuum;" the mind cannot endure its own emptiness. Imagine us left alone in a depeopled world, shut up in a room walled with reflecting glass, where nothing but our own image should meet us at every turn,—the very thought is unendurable; and something like this occurs when we fail to obtain diversion from self. But it is Christ's message to tell us of a new self which it is the will of God to impart to us; a new heart in which it will please God to dwell, and with which He can hold fellowship; the soul comes to rest on an Eternal Power that is not ourselves, yet intimately related to us.

4. *The load of a guilty conscience.* It may be difficult to forgive another; it is more difficult to forgive oneself. How profoundly Christ meets this guilty dejection of the human heart! The power which He claimed on earth to forgive sins is continued, in a declarative sense, in His Church, and sin-laden souls may be warned that in disbelieving the Gospel of forgiveness they tacitly reject Christ's authority; in believing it they rely on the promises of One to whom all things are given by the Father, and they are at rest.

5. *Earnest thought and noble endeavour.* Not only the bad use of mind and life, but their right and loyal use, brings its own peculiar experience of suffering. Preachers, philanthropists, strenuous labourers in every good cause, exhaust their energies in ministering to others' need; and after exhibiting pictures of cheerfulness and animation in public, sink, when alone, into occasional collapse. Instructive examples of such reaction are given in Bible story, *e.g.*, *Elijah.* In the finest minds, a fretfulness and dissatisfac-

tion with results may be found, where onlookers see a noble success. But to them, as to all weary ones, Christ, who "suffered in the flesh," says, "I will give you rest;" and to all who trust Him, He gives the rest and re-invigoration they need. — *G. Johnson, M.A., Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xv. pp. 264–266.

All around us are multitudes of weary people; weary from many causes —poverty, anxiety, spiritual despondency, non-success in Christian labour, delay in the coming of recognised answers to prayer. For all these tried and burdened hearts, Jesus, the relief-bringer, has His word in season. By these words of His, He does not release us from our duties, but helps us to perform them. He teaches us to trust Him, and trust is restful. As the infant drops over on its mother's bosom into soft repose, so faith rests its weary head on Jesus. He giveth His beloved sleep, so that they may wake up refreshed for their appointed work. It is not honest work that really wears any Christian out (α); it is the ague fit of *worry* that consumes strength, furrows the cheek, and brings on decrepitude (H. E. I. 2053, 2057, 2058), and from this destructive temper Christ delivers us (H. E. I. 952–961).

There is another weariness most distressing; that which is called *ennui*, the disgust and despair which result from the discovery that all the so-called "pleasures of the world" cannot satisfy the soul. But even for this Christ has "a word in season" (Matt. xi. 28–30). (β)—*Theodore Cuyler, D.D.*

(α) That giant of Jesus Christ who drew the Gospel chariot from Jerusalem to Rome, and had the care of all the Churches on his heart, never complained of being tired. The secret was that he never chafed his powers with a moment's worry. He was doing God's work, and he left God to be responsible for the results. He knew *whom* he believed, and felt perfectly sure that all things worked together for good to them that loved the Lord Jesus.—*Cuyler.*

(β) See the hymn commencing—

"Oh, comfort to the dreary!"

The Gospel a Word in Season to the Weary.

l. 4. *The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.*

Our blessed Lord is here represented as speaking of His own office and ministry. How gracious was that office! How full of condescending pity and love to man was that ministry! (John iii. 17; Luke iv. 18, 19.) In our text we have a true account of the tendency of the Gospel. It brings rest and refreshment to those who are seeking rest in the world, but whose hopes must end in disappointment.

I. The actual state and wants of mankind. On every hand are evidences of the fact that this is a weary world. On our race sin has laid many burdens of care and sorrow. Our fellow-men sorely need to be cheered and strengthened.

II. The suitableness of the Gospel to the existing state and circumstances of mankind. It has "a word in season," 1. For those who are weary in the service of sin. 2. For those who are weary under the painful consciousness of their guilt in the sight of God. 3. For those who are weary in striving against sin. 4. For those who are weary under the burden of temporal suffering. 5. For those who are weary under the growing infirmities and inconveniences of old age.

1. Lay hold of its great and precious promises. 2. Pray for all Christ's ministers, that they, like their Master, may be taught how to speak words of cheer and comfort. This is one of the most valuable forms of the learning which it is possible for them to possess. —*James Ford, A.M.: Twelve Sermons*, pp. 1–22.

Men need religion as they need bells for the common purposes of human life.

The forms of old and effete infidelity, as well as the more subtle and pseudo-scientific scepticism of the present age, all fail just where Christianity eminently succeeds—in adaptation to the common wants of men. The opponents of the Gospel, who marshalled their forces a century ago, made no attempt to supply its place as a religion which met the every-day wants of men. They mined the foundations of the building; they thundered at the doors; they battered its walls; but they never tried to erect a better system in its place. That attempt was left to later ages. It was for Rénan and Strauss to try to substitute for Christianity another theory of religion, and to meet the demand which the mother of Hume made of her son, "Give me something to lean on in the place of the faith you have undermined."

But our modern theorists find that it is one thing to destroy, another to build up. Does infidelity give anything on which men can fall back for comfort and support amid the common troubles of life, &c.? Does it speak in sweet accents of a rest that remaineth when weariness insupportable creeps over mind and body? We claim for Christianity that it does this very thing. It meets the every-day wants of those who embrace it. It condescends to notice the every-day weariness of tried and troubled souls. It is a Gospel that speaks to the worn and exhausted spirit. The voice like a bell chiming along the ages is, "The Lord God hath given me," &c.

I. THE SPECIAL CLASS TO WHOM THE GOSPEL IS ADDRESSED. Is not amazement awakened when this text tells us that the Gospel is sent to be a message of comfort to the weary? For this Gospel was the fruit of the tears, and blood, and agony of the dear Son of God. Does it not seem a strangely costly sacrifice, when God's dear Son drinks to its dregs the cup of condemnation, that He may speak comfort to him that is weary? The weary are everywhere upon this earth of ours. All feel a sense of oppressive fatigue. The consciousness of exhaustion is a thing so common, of such almost universal experience, that it seems one of the lesser ills of life, and beneath the notice of the Gospel. But Christ came to give men a religion which should meet their common wants, their every-day necessities. And hence it is a message to the weary, whatever the cause of their weariness be. 1. *Toil.* Or 2. *Trial.* Or 3. *Sin.* (α)

II. THE INSTRUMENT WHICH GOD EMPLOYS TO RELIEVE THE SOUL THAT IS WEARY.

"A man of words" is a term of contempt. We tell people that "deeds, not words," are our test of character. But what a momentous significance for evil or for good one word may have! On yonder hill, outside the walls of Bethany, in the midst of an astonished group, Lazarus stands a living man, though his grave-clothes are still upon him. The dead body on which corruption's work had begun is thrilled with a new life. One word did that. So, when Christ promises salvation, and comfort, and rest to the weary, it is a word through which the priceless blessing comes. The unquestionable meaning of the text is, that the instrument which God uses to give relief to the weary is Christ's word, Christ's Gospel, the message of His love for sinners.

It must be spoken in season. There are, in human experience, chances that exist but for one moment. They come and go like a flash. So are there crises in the history of every human soul. There are times when the heart seems poised upon a pinnacle. Now a breath may turn it one way or the other; and then a word spoken is a word in season. Bereavement, &c. And for that blessed work our Lord gives you "the tongue of the learned." But no man ever acquired the fruits of ripened knowledge—the harvest of wise words that speak comfort to the weary—without sowing the seed and watching over it with care. He must be *learned*, not in books of theology and libraries of religious instruction, but learned in the results of a personal experience.—

Bishop Cheney: The Preacher's Monthly, vol. vii. pp. 79–82.

(a) A brave Crusader on the field of battle was always conspicuous in armour richly gilt. Amidst the sombre hues in which others were arrayed, amidst the cold blue light of gleaming steel, his harness shone golden like the sun. There was a gaiety in his very armour that seemed to speak of a light heart within. But when one day he fell, pierced with a Saracen dart, they undid the fastenings of his breast-plate, and to the amazement of his comrades found that the inner surface of his armour was studded with iron points that pierced the quivering flesh. The panoply which gaily flashed back the sunbeams, was all the while an instrument of self-inflicted torture to its wearer. There are more men who wear such armour than we wot of. There are many who wear a gay countenance, but feel within the bitterness of death. For the appetite for sin has palled. The heart has grown weary and sick of sin, thinking of lost purity, and broken promises, and departed self-respect; the very life becomes a burden, and yet they dare not die. "They weary themselves to commit sin."—*Cheney*.

Our Saviour's Qualifications for the Successful Accomplishment of His Work.

l. 4–9. *The Lord hath given me the tongue, &c.*

We suppose the prophet Isaiah to say something of himself in these verses, engaging and encouraging himself to go on in his work as a prophet, notwithstanding the many hardships he met with, not doubting that God would stand by him, and strengthen him; but, like David, he speaks of himself as a type of Christ. Through Isaiah it is Christ who speaks to us; and as we hearken to and reflect on His words, we note three characteristics in Him which qualify Him for and secure the success He anticipates.

I. He was, and is, an acceptable preacher (ver. 4). He was this because—1. God had given Him "*the tongue of the learned.*" God, who made man's mouth, gave to Moses the tongue of the learned, to speak for the terror and conviction of Pharaoh (Ex. iv. 11, 12). He gave to Christ the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season for the comfort of those that are weary under the burden of sin (Matt. xi. 28). What a beautiful and precious feature was this in the ministry of our Lord! See what is now the best learning of a minister—to know how to comfort troubled consciences, and to speak patiently, properly, and plainly to the various cases of poor souls. Christ was able to do this because—2. God had also, or previously, given Him "*the ear of the learned*"—the ability to receive instruction. Prophets have as much need of this as of the tongue of the learned, for they must deliver what they are taught, and no other (Ezek. iii. 17). Christ Himself received, that He might give. None must undertake to be teachers, who have not first been learners (Matt. xiii. 52). Nor is it enough to hear; we must "hear as the learned," hear with all our faculties awake, hear as those who would learn by what we hear, hear and remember.

II. He was, and is, a patient sufferer (ver. 5, 6). One would have thought that He who was commissioned and qualified to speak comfort to the weary would have met with no difficulty in His work, but universal acceptance; it was, however, quite otherwise. He had both hard work and hard usage to undergo; and here He tells us with what undaunted constancy He went through with it. We have no reason to question but that the prophet Isaiah went on resolutely in the work to which God had called him, though we read not of his undergoing any such hardships as are here (it may be figuratively) described; but we are sure that this prediction was literally fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Note—1. *His ready obedience to the call addressed to Him* (ver. 5; Ps. xl. 6, 7). 2. *His patient endurance of all the suffering His obedience to the call involved* (ver. 6). All this Christ underwent for us, and voluntarily, to convince us of His willingness to save us. How much

He still undergoes, to what indignities He still submits, in His efforts to save man!

III. HE WAS, AND IS, A COURAGEOUS CHAMPION (ver. 7–9). All that in these verses was true of Isaiah is still more true of our Saviour. Observe—

1. *The secret sources of His courage.* They are two. (1.) He was assured of Divine support. "The Lord God will help me." (2.) Of this He was assured, because He was assured also of Divine approval. "He is near that justifieth me."

2. *The results of His courage.* (1.) He was confident of success in His undertaking. "I shall not be confounded. . . . I shall not be ashamed." Note, work for God is work we should not be ashamed of; and hope in God is hope we shall not be ashamed of. (2.) He could bid defiance to all opposers and opposition. "God will help me: therefore have I set my face like a flint." He had no fear of the *slanders* of His foes: "He is near that justifieth me." Nor of their *swords.* "Who will contend with me?" &c. (3.) He could foresee that He and His righteous cause would outlive all opposition. It was His foes who should pass away: "Lo, they all shall wax old like a garment; the moth shall eat them up"—a little thing will serve secretly and insensibly to destroy them.

CONCLUSION.—1. These qualities being in Christ, let us not doubt that absolute and universal victory is before Him (H. E. I. 979). 2. These qualities were in all the world's noblest reformers and benefactors. 3. These qualities must be in us, if we are to do any great work for God and our fellow-men. From Christ Himself let us seek them.—*Matthew Henry: Commentary, in loco.*

OUR SAVIOUR'S SUBMISSION TO SHAME AND SUFFERING.

l. 6. *I gave my back to the smiters, &c.*

It was for *us* that our Lord thus submitted to shame and suffering. May a spirit of tenderness, and thankfulness, and love, be given to us while we remember what He endured on our behalf!

I. OUR LORD'S HUMILIATION WAS VOLUNTARY.

He gave Himself up freely to suffer, the just for the unjust. And while He was upon earth, in pursuance of His designs, He never was at the mercy of His foes (Matt. xxvi. 53). His sufferings were the unavoidable result of His voluntary determination to save us. And they were all foreseen. For the accomplishment of two great purposes, He cheerfully gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that pulled off the hair. These were the glory of God, and the salvation of sinners.

1. The highest end of His mediation was to display the glory of the Divine character in the strongest light, to afford to all intelligent creatures (Eph. iii. 10) the brightest manifestation they are capable of receiving of the manifold wisdom of God—His holiness, justice, truth, and love, the stability and excellence of His moral government, all mutually illustrating each other, as combining and shining forth in His person and in His mediatorial work. (*a*)

2. Inseparably connected with this design, was the complete and everlasting salvation of sinners. For their sakes He endured the cross, despising the shame—for us! (P. D. 456, 457, 459).

II. OUR LORD'S HUMILIATION WAS EXTREME.

In the apprehensions of men, insults are aggravated in proportion to the disparity between the person who receives and who offers them. A blow from an equal is an offence, but would be still more deeply resented from an inferior. But if a subject, a servant, a slave, should presume to strike a king, it would be justly deemed an enormous crime. But Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord

of lords, whom all the angels of God worship, made Himself so entirely of no reputation, that the basest of the people were not afraid to make Him the object of their derision, and to express their hatred in the most contemptuous manner.

1. They spat upon Him (Matt. xxvi. 66, xxvii. 30). Great as an insult of this kind would be deemed amongst us, it was considered as still greater, according to the customs prevalent in Eastern countries. There, to spit even in the presence of a person, though it were only on the ground, conveyed the idea of disdain and abhorrence. But the lowest of the people spat in the face—not of an Alexander or a Cæsar—but of THE SON OF GOD!

2. They buffeted Him on the face, and when He meekly offered His cheek to their blows, they plucked off the hair. The beard was in the East accounted honourable (2 Sam. x. 4, 5). With savage violence they tore off the hair of His beard; while He, like a sheep before the shearers, was dumb, and quietly yielded Himself up to their outrages.

3. His back they tore with scourges, as was foretold by the psalmist (Ps. cxxix. 3). The Jewish Council condemned Him to death for blasphemy, because He said He was the Son of God. Stoning was the punishment prescribed by the law of Moses, in such cases (Lev. xiv. 16). But this death was not sufficiently lingering and tormenting to gratify their malice. To glut their insatiable cruelty, they were therefore willing to own their subjection to the Roman power to be so absolute, that it was not lawful for them to put any one to death (John xvii. 31), according to their own judicial law; and thus wilfully, though unwillingly, they fulfilled the prophecies: they preferred the punishment which the Romans appropriated to slaves who were guilty of flagitious crimes, and therefore insisted that He should be crucified. According to the Roman custom, those who were crucified were previously scourged. It was not unfrequent for the sufferers to expire under the severity and torture of scourging. And we may be certain that Jesus experienced no lenity from their merciless hands. The ploughers ploughed His back. But more and greater tortures were before Him. He was engaged to make a full atonement for human sin by His sufferings; and as He had power over His own life, He would not dismiss His spirit until He could say, "It is finished!"

"Behold the Man!" Behold the Son of God mocked, blindfolded, spit upon, and scourged!

1. Shall we continue in sin, after we know what it cost Him to expiate our sins? God forbid! (H. E. I. 4589, 4590.)

2. Shall we refuse to suffer shame for His sake, and be intimidated by the frowns or contempt of men from avowing our attachment to Him? We are, indeed, capable of this baseness and ingratitude. But if He is pleased to strengthen us by the power of His Spirit, we will account such disgrace our glory. In this, as in all things, let our Lord be our exemplar. Let us neither court the smiles of men, nor shrink at the thought of their displeasure. Let it be our constant aim to glorify God. This is the secret of Christian heroism. True magnanimity is evidenced by the real importance of the end it proposes, and by the steadiness with which it pursues the proper means of attaining that end; undisturbed by difficulty, danger, or pain, and equally indifferent to the applause or the scorn of incompetent judges. How gloriously did it shine forth in our Saviour! In this let us strive to follow Him!—*John Newton: Works*, pp. 706–709.

(α) See Watts' great hymn—
"Father, how wide Thy glory shines!"

(β) See the well-known hymn—
"Jesus, and can it ever be?"

Messiah's sufferings and supports.

I. *His sufferings.* 1. They were great

and various. 2. He willingly undertook to sustain them all (H. E. I. 913). II. *His supports.* 1. Assurance of effectual succour (ver. 7). 2. Assurance of a triumphant issue (ver. 7).

Contemplate the holy sufferer—1. As the predicted Saviour of the world. 2. As the great pattern of all holy obedience.—*Charles Simeon, M.A.*

Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other? It is quite certain that Isaiah here wrote concerning the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke viii. 31). Of whom else could you conceive the prophet to have spoken if you read the whole chapter? (Luke xxiii. 11.) Pilate, the governor, gave Him up to the cruel process of scourging. Behold your King! Turn hither all your eyes and hearts, and look upon the despised and rejected of men! The sight demands adoration.

I. Gaze upon your despised and rejected Lord as THE REPRESENTATIVE OF GOD. In Him God came into the world, making a special visitation to Jerusalem and the Jewish people, but at the same time coming very near to all mankind. He came to and called the people whom He had favoured so long, and whom He was intent to favour still (ver. 2).

1. When our Lord came into this world as the representative of God, He came with all His divine power about Him. He fed the hungry, &c. He did equal marvels to those which were wrought in Egypt when the arm of the Lord was made bare in the eyes of all the people. He did the works of His Father, and those works bare witness of Him that He was come in His Father's name.

2. But when God thus came among men He was unacknowledged (ver. 2). A few, taught by the Spirit of God, discerned Him and rejoiced; but they were so very few that we may say of the whole generation that they knew Him not.

3. Yet our Lord, when He came into the world, was admirably adapted to be the representative of God, not only because He was God Himself, but because as man His whole human nature was consecrated to the work, and in Him was neither flaw nor spot. His course and conduct were most conciliatory, for He went among the people, and ate with publicans and sinners; so gentle was He that He took little children in His arms, and blessed them; for this, if for nothing else, they ought to have welcomed Him right heartily, and rejoiced at the sight of Him. This is especially the sin of those who have heard the Gospel and yet reject the Saviour, for in their case the Lord has come to them in the most gracious form, and yet they have refused Him. This is in reality a scorning and despising of the Lord God, and is well set forth by the insults which were poured upon the Lord Jesus.

II. See the Lord Jesus as THE SUBSTITUTE FOR HIS PEOPLE. When He suffered thus, it was not on His own account, nor purely for the sake of His Father; but He was "wounded for our transgressions," &c. There has risen up a modern idea which I cannot too much reprobate, that Christ made no atonement for our sin except upon the cross: whereas in this passage we are taught as plainly as possible that by His bruising and stripes, as well as by His death, we are healed. Never divide between the life and the death of Christ. How could He have died, if He had not lived? How could He suffer except while He lived? Death is not suffering, but the end of it. Guard also against the evil notion that you have nothing to do with the righteousness of Christ, for He could not have made an atonement by His blood, if He had not been perfect in His life. He could not have been acceptable, if He had not first been proven to be holy, harmless, and undefiled. The victim must be spotless, or it cannot be presented for sacrifice. Draw no nice lines and raise no quibbling questions, but look at your Lord as He is, and bow before Him. Jesus took upon Himself our sin, and being found bearing that sin, He had to be

treated as sin should be treated. All this was voluntary. "He *gave* His back to the smiters." They did not seize and compel Him, or, if they did, yet they could not have done it without His consent. That Christ should stand in our stead by force were a little thing, even had it been possible; but that He should stand there of His own free will, and that being there He should willingly be treated with derision, this is grace indeed. Here is matter for our faith to rest upon.

III. See the Lord Jesus Christ as THE SERVANT OF GOD. He took upon Himself the form of a servant when He was made in the likeness of man. This is to be the guide of our life.

1. As a servant, Christ was personally prepared for service. He was thirty years and more here below, learning obedience in His Father's house, and the after years were spent in learning obedience by the things which He suffered.

2. Our text assures us that this service knew no reserve in its consecration. We generally draw back somewhere. Our blessed Master was willing to be scoffed at by the lewdest and the lowest of men. Such patience should be yours as servants of God.

3. Beside, there was an obedient delight in the will of the Father. How could He delight in suffering and shame? These things were even more repugnant to His sensitive nature than they can be to us; and yet, "For the joy," &c.

4. There was no flinching in Him. Notice all the while the confidence and quiet of His spirit! He almost seems to say, "You may spit upon me, but you cannot find fault with me," &c.

IV. AS THE COMFORTER OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. Our blessed Lord is well qualified to speak a word in season to him that is weary, because He Himself is lowly, and meek, and so accessible to us. 2. Beside, He is full of sympathy. 3. Then there is His example. "I gave my back," &c. Cannot you do the like? &c. He was calm amid it all. Never was there a patience like to His. This is your copy. 4. Our Saviour's triumph is meant to be a stimulus and encouragement. "Consider Him that endured," &c. (Heb. xii. 3). Though once abased and despised, now He sitteth at the right hand of God, and reigns over all things; and the day is coming when every knee shall bow before Him, &c. Be like Him, then, ye who bear His name; trust Him, and live for Him, and you shall reign with Him in glory for ever. —*C. H. Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1486.

DARKNESS EXPERIENCED, DARKNESS THREATENED.

l. 10, 11. *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, &c.* (α)

I. A MYSTERIOUS DISPENSATION DESCRIBED. A good and holy man sinking in despondency and dejection —walking in darkness and having no light. Mysterious, according to the ordinary estimate we form of what is right and fit. "No wonder," you say, "that this should be the doom of the openly ungodly, of the close hypocrite, of the presumptuous Antinomian, or even, perhaps, of the newly-awakened convert; but how strange that it should be the case with the most approved of God's people—those who fear the Lord, and obey the voice of His servant!" Yet so it has often been. A horror of great darkness fell upon Abraham. Job said, "My soul chooseth strangling rather than life." Paul complained of the messenger of Satan. Our Lord Himself said, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—Let me specify some causes of this despondency; I cannot specify all.

1. *When the course of God's Providence towards His Church is perplexed and clouded.* This was the case here. The captives were overwhelmed with their calamities (ch. xlix. 14, l. 1, 2, 3).—When God does not interpose for His church or themselves as they expected, and comes not forward in the path

they had marked out for Him, they seem like prisoners in a dungeon without a lamp; or like midnight travellers in the wood and the thicket without a star (Job xxiii. 8; Ps. lxxvii. 7–9).—Again, when their own lot is privation and suffering; when long-continued affliction of body and mind is permitted; when hope after hope is disappointed, and plan after plan is broken; when the interests of others are involved in your own, and a succession of trials takes place each darker and more painful than before, then this sorrow and dejection is felt (Lam. iii. 1, &c.)

2. *When, in conjunction with outward trials, there is a sense of sin upon the conscience, unaccompanied with adequate views of the power and grace of Christ to save.* I lay great stress on this. A sense of sin is the heaviest part of the believer's burden: and it is the natural and proper tendency of affliction to bring sin to remembrance. Much of this darkness and depression may be intended to embitter sin; to arouse the recollection of past offences and neglects before conversion, or since (Job xiii. 26; Ps. xxvii. 7; 1 Cor. xv. 9; Ezek. xvi. 43 and 63). Of some sins of ungodly men, God says, "As I live, this iniquity shall not be purged away from you till ye die;" and there are provocations in His own people which He long remembers. The Jews said, "There was an ounce of the golden calf in all the afflictions Israel suffered." For instance, after signal enjoyments of God's love, or particular mercies of God's providence, if a man be negligent and inconsistent in his walk, it seems to carry an unkindness with it that shall not be forgotten. How suggestive the remark on the misconduct of Solomon: "God was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord, *who had appeared to him twice!*" All sins under or after special mercies will meet at one time or other with special rebukes. Nothing more distresses a believer than the remembrance in darkness of abused light, in desertion of neglected love.—Then, the processes of sanctification are always incomplete. If not open sins, there may be secret departures from God: pride, bitterness, sins of the spirit.—Suppose these recollections to occur without adequate views of the power and grace of Christ, or without a consciousness of deep and often renewed repentance, dejection will occur.

3. *When the promise is very long delayed, and answers to prayer seem to be withheld* (Lam. iii. 8; Ps. lxxx. 4; 2 Cor. xii. 8).

4. *When their religious state is after all doubtful.* For the pardon may have passed the great seal of heaven, and yet the indictment be suffered to run on in the Court of Conscience. Real Christians have not at all times equal confidence in the integrity of their religious profession (H. E. I. 311–314, 323, 335–339). If you doubt the reality of your conversion, be it far from me to say the doubt is unfounded; carry the apprehension to Him who alone is able to relieve it.

II. A SAFE DIRECTION GIVEN. "Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

1. *Wait in the exercise of earnest, fervent, persevering prayer.* Go to God as the man who had not a loaf of bread in the house went to his friend at midnight. Beware of the delusion of waiting passively for some strange manifestation. The blessing is to those who actively seek, not who remain passively content. "Blessed is the man that waiteth at the posts of my doors," not who lies down at the threshold like a drunkard, asleep. In the act of seeking God, we find. In flying for refuge, we meet the promise of strong consolation. As they went, the lepers were cleansed.

2. *Strenuously abide by known duty.* Resist all temptations to employ doubtful means to extricate yourself from calamity (H. E. I. 169–176). Still fear, still obey. Take care that speculative difficulties be not increased by moral causes.

3. *Frequently review past experiences of God's mercy, enjoyed by yourself or others.* In seeking the grace you want,

do not deny the grace you have (H. E. I. 330–334). This is to bear false witness, not against your neighbour, but against yourself and God. "If the Lord were pleased to kill," &c. (Jud. xiii. 23.) Gain the benefit of the darkness (H. E. I. 1649–1654).

4. *Revolve in your mind the great and distinguishing consolations of the bright economy in which you live.* The grace and righteousness of Christ. The teaching and unction of the Holy Spirit. Not in vain is He revealed as a Comforter.

III. A FEARFUL CONTRAST BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AT THEIR WORST AND THE WICKED AT THEIR BEST. The wicked ironically counselled to walk by the light of their own fire. Antithesis between the light of God and the light of men. The faithful were to be delivered from captivity into light and liberty. But the wicked kindle a fire of their own, and are without God. Ver. 11 is not a first warning to repent, but a warning that destruction, darkness, endless sorrow, are about to descend upon them.—*Samuel Thodey.*

(α) I believe this passage has been generally, if not dangerously, misunderstood. It has been quoted, and preached upon, to prove that "a man might conscientiously fear God, and be obedient to the words of the law and the prophets; obey the voice of His servant—of Jesus Christ Himself; that is, be sincerely and regularly obedient to the moral law and the commands of our blessed Lord, and yet walk in darkness and have no light, no sense of God's approbation, and no evidence of the safety of his state." This is utterly impossible; for Jesus hath said, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." If there be some religious persons who, under the influence of morbid melancholy, are continually writing bitter things against themselves, the word of God should not be bent down to their state. There are other modes of spiritual and scriptural comfort. But does not the text speak of such a case? And are not the words precise in reference to it? I think not; and Bishop Lowth's translation has set the whole in the clearest light, though he does not appear to have been apprehensive that the bad use I mentioned had been made of the text as it stands in our common version. The text contains two questions, to each of which a particular answer is given:—

Q. 1. "*Who is there among you that feareth Jehovah?*" A. "Let him hearken unto the voice of His Servant."

Q. 2. "*Who that walketh in darkness and hath no light?*" A. "Let him trust in the name of Jehovah, and lean himself [prop himself] upon his God."

Now, a man awakened to a sense of his sin and misery, may have a dread of Jehovah, and tremble at His Word; and what should such a person do? Why, he should hear what God's Servant saith: "Come unto me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." There may be a sincere penitent walking in darkness, having no light of salvation; for this is the case with all when they first begin to turn to God. What should such do? They should trust, believe on, the Lord Jesus, who died for them, and lean upon His all-sufficient merit for the light of salvation, which God has promised. Thus acting they will soon have a sure trust and confidence that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them their sin; and thus they shall have the light of life.—*Adam Clarke, LL.D., F.A.S.*

This representation of the text by this admirable commentator is here reproduced, in order that preachers may be warned against repeating it. Lowth's treatment of the text, on which it is founded, has been repudiated by all our most eminent scholars, with the exception of Matthew Arnold. Kay and Cheyne agree with Delitzsch in ending the question with the second clause: "Who is there among you that feareth Jehovah, that hearkeneth to the voice of His servant? He that walketh in darkness, and hath no light, let him trust in the Name of Jehovah, and rely upon his God (*Cheyne*).

Plumtre's comment on ver. 10 is excellent:—"The words grow at once out of the prophet's own experience and that of the ideal Servant (ver. 6). All true servants know what it is to feel as if the light for which they looked had for a time failed them, to utter a prayer like Ajax, 'Give light, and let us die' (Hom. *Il.* xvii. 647). *The* Servant felt it when He uttered the cry, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' (Matt. xxvii. 46). For such an one there were the words of counsel, 'Trust, in spite of the darkness.' (β) So the cry of the forsaken Servant was followed by the word, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit' (Luke xxiii. 46).'

(β) As it happened to the Saviour, so it will happen to His disciples, who are known by their fear of the Lord, and their obedience to the voice of His Son. There will be times when it may be said of them that they "walk in darkness, and have no light." The rule then is, after the example of Him who said, "The Lord will help me, therefore I shall not be confounded," to trust in the Lord; and if the blind man who walks in darkness trusts in the brute that guides him, and goes on his sightless way without a fear and without a doubt, how much more may the believer fear not with such a stay on which to lean!—*Keith.*

I. The best of men may find themselves walking, as it were, in the valley of the shadow of death. (a)

II. They should then honestly examine themselves (H. E. I. 4446–4464).

III. If as the result of that examination they see that "the fear of the Lord" is the governing principle of their hearts, they should walk on in the path of duty submissively and hopefully. The God whom they trust will keep them in the midst of the darkness, and in His own time, which is always the best, will lead them forth into light.

(a) For developments of these divisions, see other outlines on this text.

Spiritual Darkness.

I. 10. *Who is there among you that feareth Jehovah, that hearkeneth to the voice of His servant? He that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of Jehovah, and rely upon his God.*

Micah vii. 8. *When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.*

These utterances make it clear that spiritual darkness occurred at times in the experience of the prophets of the Lord. His people now must not be surprised if it befalls them, nor should they then be dismayed.

I. Darkness as a fact of Christian experience, and the Christian's proper exercise under it.

In the natural world it is not always light; the sun goes down and darkness spreads, &c. So in higher life. The spiritual heavens are not always bright.

1. *It may be the light of faith that is darkened.* Spiritual realities are withdrawn into shadow. There is a God to rule over all and love all, but where is He? There is a Christ to die for all, but where is the cross? The cloud has fallen even on Calvary. What is the man to do? Do! He is to believe. Faith is not wholly gone. Both texts call on its exercise. The light exercises sense. It is the darkness that exercises faith.

2. *It may be the light of God's face that is felt to be withdrawn.* The soul feels deserted and is in dismay—for God's favour is its life. The resource against this feeling of abandonment is God's character and word, and the gift of His Son (chap. liv. 8; Job xiii. 15).

3. *Darkness may come in the form of the fading away of some Christian hope*—personal hopes, or hopes for the kingdom of God (H. E. I. 323). With the sun of hope gone down behind the sky what are we to do? Remember (1.) This setting of hope is not for ever. It precedes a glorious dawn. God is the God of hope. He often lets hope wane that it may gather strength. (2.) Though the sun of hope has set for ever on earth, earth is not all.

It may be remarked here that this dark experience gives a striking demonstration that God only is man's comforter (2 Cor. i. 3, 4). The spiritual helper of the man who sits in darkness feels he may as well throw his words on the dead wall; and the sufferer whom he would help is ready to say of all human helpers whatever, "miserable comforters," &c.

II. Darkness as a means of spiritual discovery.

Perhaps the best explanation of this darkness, and it is a vindication too, is found in the results which it works. In nature the darkness of night lets us see what we cannot see when the sun is shining. The unnumbered worlds of God are not seen under the effulgence of noonday. It is the same with spiritual night in the soul, or may be the man of God may then get great enlargement of spiritual information and understanding—under the dim starlight of darkened faith and hope may more truly descry the positions, relations, and magnitudes of Divine realities. His experience improves and enlarges his knowledge of God's ways and of himself to begin with, and from that beginning a great deepening and widening of his spiritual education

may be effected. And by and by he shall come forth into the light with treasures of wisdom and knowledge far greater than if the cloud had never overshadowed him. There are worlds we are told which, having two suns in their heavens, are perpetually in the light. What can the inhabitants of these worlds know of the universe, if their sunlight is of a nature like ours? So with those whose spiritual heaven is always bright. They can on that account perhaps see not so near to the throne of God. In heaven it is always light, but the light there is not the light of the sun. The help of darkness is no longer needed there.

There need be no mystery why all this is so. The man who sits in darkness is by the pressure of his position made a more diligent searcher into Divine things. The mind that feels the darkness spreading immediately around, is made to seek the light that is far away. When a man is always in the light he may be too easily satisfied with the light he has. Darkness brings alarm. It quickens. It shows how easily all our satisfactions may be gone (H. E. I. 117–121).

III. DARKNESS AS A DISCIPLINE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

It may secure for it some of its best graces—the mildest, the most mellowed, the most hallowed. There are plants that grow best in a dim light. Amongst those Christian graces that take deeper root in the dark are—1. *Humility.* It is not when the windows of heaven are open that the child of God feels himself a broken cistern, and looks up and says, "All my well-springs," &c. More readily does he do this when the windows of heaven are shut and there is no rain. 2. *Trustfulness.* 3. *Self-surrender.*

IN CONCLUSION:—Ye servants of God who sit in darkness, beware of two things—*impatience* and *sullen indifference.* Don't fret as if God did not heed your grief. Don't be callous as if He were not dealing with you. Pray for the light, but will not your prayers be heard the sooner and the enlargement you seek be sent the more speedily, if you long less for the deliverance than for the full benefit of the chastening?—*J. Wardrop, D.D.: Homiletical Quarterly*, vol. v. pp. 32–34.

GOD'S MESSAGE TO THE DESPONDING.

I. 10. *Who is among you that feareth the Lord? &c.*

It is not, then, a thing unheard of or impossible, that a child of God should "walk in darkness and have no light." And when the sadness of such an experience comes upon the saint, it will not be always safe to say that it is the shadow of some special sin. It may not be with him as it was with David when he cried, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation," after committing the great transgressions which stain his name; nor, as it was with Elijah, when running from the post of duty, "under the juniper tree" he wailed, "O Lord, take away my life now!" The case described in the text is different from these. It is that of one who even at the moment "feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of His Servant," while yet he is bending under the weight of spiritual despondency.

Many would say flippantly that a Christian must be very feeble indeed if he is ever in such a state; and some, cruelly, that he who permits himself thus to lie "in heaviness" cannot be a Christian at all. But all such unqualified assertions spring out of a shallow philosophy and a superficial experience. Our salvation depends on Christ, and not on our emotions regarding it. Hence, they who roundly affirm that if a man be walking in darkness, and finding no light, he cannot be a Christian, are making salvation depend, not on God's work for a man and in time, but simply and entirely on his own emotions. Moreover, they forget some of the best-known passages in

the history even of the most eminent saints (Ps. xlii. ; 1 Pet. i. 6).

But while despondency furnishes no valid reason for calling the genuineness of one's religion in question, it is very far from being a comfortable thing in itself. He should be encouraged to get out of it as soon as possible ; for it puts everything about him into shadow. For his own happiness, and for the good of others, it is in every way desirable that he should be brought out of the darkness into the light.

It may contribute to this result if we consider—

I. THE CAUSES OUT OF WHICH DESPONDENCY MAY SPRING.

1. *Natural temperament.* However it may come, whether through heredity, or on the principle of special characteristics being given directly by God to every man, it is the fact that each of us is born with a certain predisposition to joy or sadness, to irascibility or patience, to quickness of action or deliberateness of conduct. And it is also true, that while conversion may Christianise that temperament, it does not change it.

There are some men to whom, Christianity apart, it comes as natural to be joyful as it does to the lark to sing. And there are others, alas ! whose disposition inclines them always to look on the darker side of things. In the former case there is no merit in the gladness, just as in the latter there is no blame in the sadness. We are often shamefully unjust in our estimates of our fellows ; we don't know what is restrained, we only know what comes out. And the same thing holds in this matter of despondency. But Christ knows. And He will not be unjust like men : He will give you honour in proportion to your effort to get above it.

2. *Disease.* The connection between the soul and the body is intimate and mysterious ; they act and react upon each other. Lowness of spirits is very often the result of some imprudence in diet, or some local disturbance. Not all spiritual depressions can be resolved into the consequences of physical states ; but in all ordinary cases the sound body is necessary to the sound mind. A Christian physiologist might render great service to many despondent spirits by preparing a work which should treat of the effects of different diseases on religious experience.

See the relief which this affords. It removes from religion the responsibility for the depression of such a man as Cowper ; while on the other hand it removes from Christianity the reproach for the hypocrisy of men who, on seeming deathbeds are saints, but get well again to transgress afresh ; for there, too, the exhilaration was owing to the peculiar character of the malady. When we can trace our despondency to such a cause, it will cease to be a thorn to us. One, while he lay dying, had Ps. lxxvii. read to him, and when he heard ver. 10, "And I said, This is my infirmity," he broke in with the words, "That's my liver. My soul and body so act one upon the other. With the liver wrong, the mind gets clouded, and I feel as though God had swept me out of His house as useless ; but after He has taken so much trouble to mould the vessel, He will not throw it aside." The sufferer recognised the spiritual effect of the disease.

3. *Trial.* One affliction will not usually becloud the horizon ; but when a whole series comes in succession, the effect is terrible. First, it may be, comes sickness ; and we are getting round when business difficulties overwhelm us ; then, these are scarcely arranged before bereavement comes. For years, it may be, we are like the sailor who for weeks is seeking to round a stormy cape, and still the same weariful headland frowns drearily on him. The same effect may be produced by the mere monotony of our labour, without any special affliction.

> "Love adds anxiety to toil,
> And sameness doubles cares ;
> While one unbroken chain of work
> The flagging temper wears."

Mothers and housekeepers know what is meant by the assertion that "sameness doubles cares ;" and it is when

such a burden is lying most heavily upon the heart that the words of the text come to us with their soothing influence.

4. *Mental perplexity.* The spirit of inquiry and bold independent criticism is abroad in our age. The sacred things of our faith are assailed. When your children, now young men, are wrestling their way through the peculiar mental difficulties of this age, do not upbraid nor blame them, but help them by entering into their difficulties, and removing, if you can, every stumbling-block from their path. And let those who are thus walking in darkness take to themselves the comfort of the text, and walk on in the full assurance that there is light beyond.

II. THE COUNSELS TO THE DESPONDING GIVEN OR SUGGESTED BY THIS TEXT.

1. *The oppressed spirit must keep on fearing the Lord and obeying the voice of His servant.* Whatever happens, these must not be given up. Nothing whatever can furnish any proper reason for ceasing to practise them; while, on the other hand, the neglect of them will only deepen the darkness already over you. The tunnel may be long, but it will come to an end at last, if only you will go through it. Whatever you feel, let no evil be wrought by you, but keep steadily in the path of rectitude. Amid all doubts you must accept some things as certain; hold by these, then, and act up to them, so will you prove that you are a docile learner, and put yourself into a position where you will catch the first glimpses of returning light. Only by acting up to the level of our present convictions can we rise to higher things. Sometimes an evil life has led to a shipwreck of the faith; but always a good character clarifies the spiritual conception (John vii. 17). Keep your conduct abreast of your conscience, and very soon your conscience will be illumined by the radiance of God.

2. *Keep on trusting God.* What a blessed privilege it is to be permitted to do that! When we cannot see, it is an unspeakable blessing to have some hand to cling to; and when that hand is God's, it is all right. But let us take the full comfort of this saying, "Let him trust in the name of the Lord." What is that name? It is "Jehovah, God, merciful and gracious; long-suffering; forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty." Therefore I need not despair about my guilt, for there is forgiveness with Him. It is Jehovah Tsidkenu—the Lord our righteousness. Therefore we may in Him have "boldness in the day of judgment." It is Jehovah Ropheka—the Lord that healeth thee. Therefore I may bring all my spiritual maladies to Him for cure. It is Jehovah Jireh—the Lord will provide. Therefore He will give me that which is needful. It is Jehovah Nissi—the Lord my banner; and in it I may see the symbol of His protection. It is Jehovah Shalom—the Lord of peace; and so, beneath His sheltering wing, I may be for ever at rest.

3. *Fail not to note the deep meaning of that word "stay."* It does not bid you only take a momentary grasp of God's hand, it encourages you to lean your whole weight upon Him, and to do that continuously. Acquaint yourself with God through Jesus Christ, so shall you know that there is something better even in the Christian's despondency than there is in the unbeliever's joy.—*W. M. Taylor, D.D.: Limitations, &c.*, pp. 312–326.

This text is applicable to believers under all circumstances of trouble. The Lord is always the same; and faith must not wait until trouble is removed, but stay upon Him, lean upon Him when trouble is deepest. We have

I. A SKETCH OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant?" Those terms contain the universal elements of Christian character as an inward affection and an outward manifestation.

1. *As an inward affection.* The soul

has been made alive to God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Man possesses a capacity of affection which can fix on God as its object. But fallen man is alienated from Him; dead to Him. God's regenerating grace quickens into life that capacity of affection; so that there is the loving, childlike fear of God the heavenly Father, instead of the previous indifference to Him.

2. *As an outward manifestation.* It is characteristic of Christians that they obey the voice of Christ. When He called them to repent and believe in Him, they obeyed. And, however imperfectly, they endeavour in their daily walk to obey Him. His revealed will is the accepted rule of their lives. He is their Master, their King.

II. A GLIMPSE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

"That walketh in darkness, and hath no light." This is not the normal experience of believers. They are "children of light, and of the day." God has called them "out of darkness into His marvellous light" (2 Cor. iv. 6). The light, revealing pardon, acceptance, sanctification, future glory, causes us to walk in calmness and conscious security. Yet it may not shine with uniform clearness. The sun in the heavens is sometimes obscured by passing clouds; but it is shining, all the same. The normal day has the sun shining so that we see clearly the objects around us, and are able to pursue our avocations without interruption

Again, while these seasons of darkness are variations from the usual experience of believers, some are visited by them more than others. The causes are also various. Some spiritual, some physical. No Christian's experience must be made the measure, in all respects, of another's. When you have mentioned a few things, you have exhausted the *essential* things of the spiritual life; and even these are experienced variously according to the constitution of the different minds. Some are exercised with dark experiences, from which others are exempted. Luther seemed at times to himself to fight with Satan as a personal power, living, visible, audible. John Bunyan describes similar experience in the story of his life in the book entitled "Grace Abounding." The reflex of that experience is in his description of the Pilgrim in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Let no one be deterred from entering the Christian course under the apprehension that he *must* have an experience like this. Nor let any one afflict himself with the idea that he is not a Christian because he has had no such experience. Few natures are so strong and intense as to be capable of it. God dealt with Luther and Bunyan according to their natures, and thus prepared them for the great work they had to do. And with most, even after seasons of conflict and victory, there is danger of reaction in the direction of spiritual darkness. Unbelief may represent the difficulties of the way. Despairing fears and presumptuous hopes alike may draw you from the narrow path. Thoughts, passions, words of evil which you have repented and which you hate, may struggle for indulgence and expression against the resistance of your better nature. It is one of the most terrible facts about sin, that, even though repented and forsaken, old sins so imbed themselves in the nature that their expulsion is the work of time and of many a struggle. Traps and perils lie on every hand, with their opportunities and inducements to the indulgence of sin. If backsliding of the heart has not preceded its commission, its commission may compel backsliding of the heart.

And as there may be spiritual darkness in the soul, there may be the darkness of uncertainty as to the way of God's providence. There may be bereavement, sickness, disappointment, loss, a state of things with regard to worldly affairs pregnant with anxiety, through which no way can be seen. Your heart is heavy. You fear the worst.

III. A REMINDER OF CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE.

"Let him trust in the name of the

Lord, and stay upon his God." It is the Christian's privilege to trust in God at all times. Observe, you are not to wait until the darkness has cleared away and then trust; but to trust now, in the darkness. For this is always possible, inasmuch as He in whom we trust is ever the same, notwithstanding any danger that may occur in us or in our circumstances.

Be instant in prayer. When enveloped in darkness you can keep hold of your Father's hand. He will guide and help. He has promised to keep the feet of His saints. Cry to Him out of the darkness. Trust Him. Prayer is the believing cry of the heart that is satisfied that, however dark and dreary the way, He is leading us by a right way to a city of habitation. So long as He is there, what can we fear?

Be careful as to your walk. Knowing the perils of darkness, you cannot afford to be careless in your conduct. The path is narrow and difficult to find. You may miss it and fall on either side.

You are not alone in the darkness of sorrow. Christ has been there before you. He will be with you. Prayer shall be heard. Faith shall be honoured. The light of God's countenance shall be lifted upon you. The day shall dawn and the shadows flee away.—*J. Rawlinson.*

I. *The godly man's character.* 1. He feareth the Lord. 2. He obeys the divine commands.

II. *The godly man's trouble.* "Walketh in darkness, and hath no light." Providential darkness.

III. *The godly man's best course in trouble.* "Let him trust," &c.—*I. E. Page.*

Encouragement for the Devoted and Obedient.

l. 10. *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, &c.*

The encouragement here is for the people of God, and for them only. It is sometimes appropriated by those who are merely His people in profession; and in view of it, they are confident that though they have no satisfactory evidence of the Divine favour, all will be well with them in the end. They make a terrible mistake. The darkness of which they are conscious, is the result of the hiding from them of "the light of God's countenance," a calamity that never befalls those who are truly His people. (α) But God's people may be in darkness of another kind, in which they need all the cheer here offered them. For example, in the preceding chapters, Isaiah speaks of the Babylonian captivity, and of the oppressions of the Israelites during that dark period of their deliverance and restoration to their own land. Such, however, was the strength and resources of the Chaldean empire, and to such a state of imbecility and wretchedness had the Israelites been reduced, that the fulfilment of the prediction appeared impossible, or in the highest degree improbable. Therefore, knowing how dark and discouraging the prospects of His people would be in this state of captivity, God reminds them of what He had done for their ancestors in times past; how He had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt by the most extraordinary interpositions; and He tells them that they were still His covenant people, and would not be forsaken by Him (chap. xlix. 14–16). Lest in their despondency they should doubt His ability to accomplish their deliverance, He refers them to the works of creation and providence as illustrative of His power (chap. xl. 12–17, 25–28; l. 2, 3). Our text appears to form part of the expostulations intended to dispel the fears and to revive the hopes of His desponding people. There was a pious remnant who answered to the description contained in it; and he tells them, in effect, that though they had no light as to the manner in which He would

accomplish their deliverance and restoration, yet they might confidently trust His power and faithfulness.

Specimen cases to which our text might also be profitably applied. 1. Any case like that of Joseph, while lying under the reproach of a crime which he never committed, and which he abhorred. We know what a great trial it was to his pure mind, how he stayed upon God, and what was the happy result.

2. The situation of David during the lifetime of Saul. God had promised that he should be king over His people; and yet he was obliged to fly for his life, to wander among the mountains, and to hide himself in dens and caves of the earth. Thus he was walking in darkness as to any prospect of relief, except from a Divine interposition. But walking in darkness in this sense was perfectly consistent with the most vigorous exercise of gracious affections, and with the fullest assurance of Divine favour; and judging by his psalms composed during this period, we can have no doubt of the spirituality of his mind, or of his confidence in God. While he feared the Lord and obeyed His voice, he was authorised to trust in Him for the full accomplishment of His promises; and doing so, he was finally delivered from all his enemies, and raised to the throne of Israel. From this result, we see that it was not necessary for him to use any unlawful means, either for self-preservation, or for the attainment of the object which had been promised him. It was only necessary that he should trust in the Lord and obey His voice. *And this is the Christian's duty and privilege in circumstances of the greatest trial* (H. E. I. 155–165, 169–177).

3. The case of the Church at the present day, when looking at the moral condition of the world in connection with the prophecies. The conversion of the world is predicted in the Bible with as much certainty as was the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity; and the obstacles which oppose the accomplishment of this prediction are far greater than those that darkened the prospects of the captive Jews. The disparity between Jonathan and his armour-bearer and the army of the Philistines was not so great as that which exists between the army of Christ now in the field and the hundreds of millions who fill the ranks of the enemy. Therefore the Church may be said to be walking in darkness with respect to the conversion of the world; she does not see how the immense obstacles are to be removed. But clear predictions have been given that the world shall be converted, and in Him who made them the Church should trust, obeying His voice by diligently employing all the means He has already entrusted to her, assured that He will as certainly verify these predictions, as He did those which related to the restoration of Israel from the captivity of Babylon (H. E. I. 1161, 1162).—*William C. Walton, A.M.: American National Preacher*, vol. iv. 285–292.

(a) What can be meant by the phrase, "the light of God's countenance," but an expression of the Divine approbation? When a father is pleased with the conduct of his son, approbation is expressed in his countenance. If the son behaves amiss, he soon observes a change in the expression of his father's countenance towards him, and is generally conscious that he has done wrong. If at any time he should observe such a change without at once knowing the cause, he will immediately suspect himself, and will ask, What have I done to offend my father? So, when the children of God walk in His fear, and in obedience to His commands; when their supreme object is to glorify Him in all that they do, they enjoy the light of His countenance, *i.e.*, the expression of His favour (Ps. xxxvii. 23; John xiv. 21; Heb. xi. 5). When He frowns upon any man, it is an expression of His displeasure, telling them by the darkness which rests upon their minds that *something is wrong*, and that they ought to examine their heart and conduct, and to compare both with His word, in order to ascertain where the fault lies (2 Chron. xv. 2; Deut. xxxi. 16, 17; Isa. lxiv. 7; Ezek. xxxix. 23, 24). These passages, and others which relate to the subject, cannot be reconciled with the supposition that the text was intended for the encouragement of those from whom the light of God's countenance is deservedly withdrawn, and who are walking in darkness as to religious enjoyment, and as to any evidence of the Divine favour and acceptance. To *them* He does not say, "Trust in My name, and stay yourselves upon Me, for the darkness will soon pass away, and all will end well." No; when He frowns

it is an unequivocal declaration of His displeasure; it is a signal of alarm; a call to repent, and to do works meet for repentance.

Through the whole economy of grace comfort is connected with the active and faithful performance of duty. This fact has not been generally recognised. Hence the perversion of the text; and hence the low state of religious enjoyment in the Church. Indolent and inconsistent professors appear not to understand the reason why they are left to walk in darkness. Instead of ascribing it to their neglect of duty, to their sins, they resolve it into "human imperfection," "moral necessity," "divine sovereignty," "an expedient to try their faith," or "to make them humble;"—anything, in short, but the true cause. They say "it is the common experience of Christians to walk in darkness sometimes, and we cannot expect to be always on the mount;" and thus they satisfy themselves, without the present exercise of right feelings towards God or their fellowmen, and without a disposition to do their duty. They are serving, not God, but themselves; they are devoted to this world; its objects and pursuits engross their thoughts; while they are doing little or nothing for that Saviour who laboured and died for sinners. It is unreasonable, nay, presumptuous for such persons to expect or hope that God will lift up the light of His countenance upon them.—*Walton.*

I. THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES IN A GODLY MAN'S CHARACTER. 1. *Feareth the Lord.* An intelligent and an affectionate principle—the fear of the affectionate child and loyal subject. 2. *Obeyeth the voice of His servant.* Great test of godly sincerity.

II. THE SUPPOSED CONDITION OF THE GODLY MAN. 1. *This is not the ordinary condition of the Christian.* He is a child of the light, &c. He has the light of the divine (1) *knowledge* in his understanding, (2) *truth* in his judgment, (3) *hope* in his soul, (4) *joy* in his experience, (5) *holiness* in his life. He is not of the night nor of darkness. 2. *Yet this is sometimes the condition of the best of saints.* It is the result of (1.) Providential trials. (2.) Nervous depression.

III. THE REMEDY WHICH THE TEXT PRESCRIBES. 1. *The name of God must be our trust.* It cannot alter, change, deceive. 2. *The soul must be stayed upon God.* We are apt to stay the soul on other things—friends, means, experience, frames, and feelings. God in His relationship to us as our God, must be the basis of our confidence and hope. Trust in His wisdom, power, grace, love—His promise never to forsake.—*J. Burns, D.D.*

COUNSEL AND COMFORT FOR THE AFFLICTED.

l. 10. *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, &c.*

God's government of man as a moral agent presents many evident marks of wisdom and design; yet it is everywhere so replete with enigmas, that the best and wisest of men have often found themselves involved in the deepest perplexity. We know that providence superintends and controls all events, that all the Divine proceedings are the result of unerring wisdom and unbounded goodness, and that God invariably connects His own glory with the happiness of His creatures; but when we attempt to apply these general principles to many particular cases, we find ourselves baffled and confounded. We know not why it was that evil was permitted to enter into the world, &c. With respect to individual cases, we know not why the young are often cut off in the flower and vigour of their days, &c. Such are some of the difficulties which present themselves when we attempt to investigate the ways of God.

I. Reason, however, if duly exercised, will suggest a variety of causes why they assume this mysterious character, and why we ought to suppress in ourselves the workings of unbelief, dissatisfaction, and despondency (H. E. l. 4031–4056; P. D. 1432, 1435–1437, 1441, 2268, 2537, 2538, 2895, 2896, 2902).

1. Much of the mystery which pervades the dispensations of providence arises *from the feeble and limited character of our comprehension.*

2. As the general principles of the Divine conduct are thus placed beyond

our apprehension, so are the *occasional motives of His dispensations;* those motives which arise from His perfect acquaintance with the characters of men, and His accurate perception of their real wants and true interests.

3. *The moral defection of our nature* renders us incapable of discerning the ways of providence.

4. Much of the obscurity of providence arises *from the unwillingness of men to censure themselves.* For often those things which confound them are only the natural consequences of their own misconduct.

5. We also err *by judging prematurely.* In any complicated work of human art it is found necessary to be acquainted with the whole design, in order to judge of the fitness of the parts. In a scheme so complex as that which Divine providence is pursuing, where all the parts refer to one another, and where what is seen is often subordinate to what is invisible, how is it possible but our judgment must often be erroneous?

II. At present man is thus incapable of exploring the mysteries of providence. Instead of lamenting our ignorance and incapacity, let us consider how it may be improved; what duties it suggests, and what wise ends it was intended by providence to promote. It should teach us—1. *Submission.* How unreasonable, how ungrateful to repine, when we know that infinite wisdom and goodness have the management of all our concerns. There is an end, a design, in every movement of providence, and that design will ultimately be found every way worthy of God.

2. *Patience.* It cautions us against being too precipitate in our decisions, or too anxious to know until it is God's pleasure to reveal. We are not doomed to perpetual ignorance and uncertainty (H. E. I. 154, 3675–3706).

3. It furnishes a stimulus to *duty and perseverance.* Let no one say,—Since I am surrounded with darkness, as there are nothing but difficulties, I shall therefore sit down and leave it all, &c. Such a conclusion would be equally unwise and prejudicial. On the contrary, if there be an all-wise providence, what an argument is this for the exercise of faith, patience, hope, prayer, and perseverance. The darkness which surrounds us is intended both to call forth our inquiries and to enforce our dependence on the gracious aid of the Almighty.

4. It should inspire a *desire of Heaven.*

5. It should induce *gratitude for the clear revelation which God has made known of the things that belong to our peace.* He has thrown an air of obscurity over a thousand things, but not over the means of attaining light and salvation; here all is day. He hath clearly taught us what we must do to be saved, &c. Apply, therefore, your heart and conscience to the plain, undeniable declarations of revelation. What is revealed is of far more importance to you than what is not revealed. God has withheld the less and given us the greater. There is no knowledge of any kind that will bear a comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. You are called upon, by believing on Him, to lay hold on eternal life; have you done this?—*J. H. Walker: Companion for the Afflicted,* second edition, pp. 249–270.

Sparks of our own Kindling.

l. 11. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, &c.*

There is no more intelligible image, none more interwoven into the texture of thought and phraseology, than that by which Light is made to express joy and felicity, while Darkness, and other kindred terms, are used to denote discomfort and misery. The inspired writers sanction and adopt it (Ps. xcvii. 11; Esther viii. 16; Ps. lxxxviii. 6; Isa. lix. 11).

Happiness is the reality of which light is the symbol; and the Gospel teaches us that its chief ingredients are peace with God, and communion with Him. Nothing more is needed to constitute a truly happy man, than that the avenues of intercourse between God and the soul, which have been obstructed and blocked by sin, should once more be reopened—a work which can be effected only by the reconciliation of God to man by the work of the Son, and of man to God by the work of the Holy Spirit. Into the enjoyment of this true happiness we must enter *now*, if we are ever to know it. The bliss of saints in a state of glory is not (as to its chief elements) different in kind from that of saints in a state of grace. The happiness of the gracious soul is the germ—that of the glorified soul is the bright and perfumed flower, expanded out of the germ by the agencies of genial climate and bright sunshine. The pursuit of happiness is natural to us as men, but we seek it in wrong directions, and again and again we are disappointed in our search; like the meteor, which the ignorant traveller mistakes for a light, and follows across the marsh, happiness, just when we seem to have secured it, escapes from our grasp: another tempting resource offers itself, promises as fairly, excites apprehensions as bright as the preceding, and shortly afterwards ends in disappointment as distressing. In our text, the many fictitious sources from which men seek to derive happiness are compared to a fire kindled, and sparks struck out, by way of relieving the darkness of the night. It is, of course, implied in the metaphor, that true happiness, the real and adequate complement of man's nature, resembles the divinely created and golden sunlight.

I. This comparison does not lead us to deny that pleasure and gratification of a certain kind are derivable from worldly sources. Just as man can relieve himself in great measure from the discomfort and inconvenience of natural darkness by kindling a fire and surrounding himself with sparks, so can he alleviate, to a certain extent, the instinctive sense of disquietude and dissatisfaction, so irksome to him at intervals of leisure, by the various enjoyments which life has to offer. It is a mistake to deny this, in the interests of religion. In artificial pleasures, in displays of personal skill, in gratification of sensual appetite, or in the researches of natural curiosity, many find that excitement which, for the time being, dissipates the thought of their uneasiness. Indeed, even as some fires of man's kindling shed around them a more dazzling lustre, and a richer, redder glow than the sunlight itself, so some of the qualifications of time and sense glisten more brightly, and blaze more brilliantly, than the peace and pleasantness experienced in wisdom's ways.

II. But connected with all earthly pleasures, there are drawbacks.

1. Those gratifications are the taper lights, by whose bright shining the moths of this world are attracted, and in whose radiance they flutter,—lights which gleam brightly for a moment, but will fade and die down before the sobering dawn of Eternity (H. E. I. 4975–4989, P. D. 2730).

2. At the beginning of the festival, Satan and the World set forth the good wine, and, when men have well drunk, "that which is worse" (Luke xv. 13 and 16).

3. Worldly enjoyments (even those of the highest order) pall by degrees upon the jaded appetite (H. E. I. 4974). (*a*)

4. Unsatisfactoriness inheres in their very nature, inasmuch as they are all (more or less) artificial. They are miserable substitutes which man has set up to stand him in stead of that true happiness which is congenial to his nature and adapted to his wants. During the sun's absence, he can replace its light by the sorry substitute of torch and taper; but the glare which these shed around is not like the genial, cheering light of the sun itself. It exercises no quickening influence on vegetable life,—its clear shining brings not out the bloom and perfume of the

flower, nor the verdure of the tender grass, nor sends a thrill of joy through the whole realm of nature. So, though out of the abundant materials constituting God's universe, man can construct for himself varied sources of pleasure and luxury, these amount, after all, only to a light that is rather dazzling than comforting, — a light whose cold unfructifying ray reaches only to the surface of the soul—penetrates not to the depths of his conscience, nor to the moving springs of his character!

5. The enjoyment derived from worldly sources is fitful. The glow of a kindled fire is not equable. It casts a flickering and uncertain light, now mouldering beneath the fuel which feeds it, now bursting forth into bright and vivid flashes. Thus it presents us with a lively emblem of worldly joy, which is subject to repeated alternations of revival and decay, and whose high pitch can be sustained only for a short time. Anon it bursts into ecstasy, and having blazed a while with peculiar brilliancy, sinks again, as suddenly as it broke forth, into despondency and depression of spirits (Eccl. vii. 6). Not so the peace and pleasantness derived from walking with God. If it be not a light so dazzling as that which is sometimes shed abroad by the kindled firebrands of worldly joys, it is at least subject to no such variations of lustre. It pervades the soul, as the sunlight pervades the world, with a serene and equable ray,—diffusing a genial and comfortable temperature through the whole spiritual system.

6. A fire requires to be continually fed with fresh fuel, if its brilliancy and warmth are to be maintained. Hence it becomes an apt emblem of the delusive joy of this world, which is only kept alive in the worldling's heart by the fuel of excitement. As soon as the excitement subsides, the gratification of this world's votary is at an end. Then he must set off again on a fresh voyage of discovery, in quest of new expedients for self-forgetfulness. But these expedients have their limits. Our tenure of the resources which procure them, and on which they are dependent—health and wealth —is exceedingly precarious. But the true happiness is in no way dependent for its maintenance upon excitement or external resources. (β)

7. But perhaps the chief drawback of the worldling's so-called happiness is that it is accompanied by so much anxiety—that it is subject to frequent intrusions from alarm, whenever a glimpse of the future breaks in upon the mind. Possibly this feature of it, too, is symbolised in the prophetic imagery here employed to denote it. It is in the night time, when the kindled fire glows upon the hearth, and man pursues his employments by the light of the torch or taper, that apprehensions visit his mind, and phantom forms are conjured up that scare the ignorant and the superstitious. Forebodings more terrible still intrude upon the worldling,—phantoms and presages of judgment to come flit across the darkness of his mind. He wishes they were equally groundless with the fears of the superstitious; but he *knows* they are not so, and that knowledge mars his merriment!

III. Observe the solemn irony with which the devotees of worldly pleasure are warned of their folly. It is but seldom that the Word of God adopts the instrumentality of irony. But when it does so, we may be sure that the sinful or worldly courses, commented on in such a strain, are proofs of a desperate and almost insane folly in those who pursue them (*cf.* 1 Kings xxii. 15, and Eccl. xi. 9). The pitiful and biting irony of our text—"Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks ye have kindled!"—has in it more of sorrow than of anger, and is vented in the fulness of the Divine compassions, if perchance it might warn some careless soul to bethink itself of judgment, and so might reclaim it from its folly. (γ)

As you would avoid the thorns of self-recrimination and alarm with which the deathbed of those who have their

portion in this life is so thickly set, be persuaded, while yet it is within your reach, to seek that true happiness which shall stand you in stead when you are driven out of all creature resources, and when heart and flesh faileth.—*E. M. Goulburn, D.C.L.: Sermons*, pp. 428–454.

(α) How strongly contrasted this with the Divine principle of recompense, according to which every forward step which a man makes in conformity to God's Image, and obedience to God's commands, is attended by an increase of joy and peace—an increase sometimes very sensibly felt at the close of a Christian's career, when, as his tempest-tossed bark nears that haven of rest where he would be, a mighty spiritual refreshing breathes in upon his heart, like perfumed gales from the shore of a land of spices. His bliss is not merely an abiding, but also an increasing bliss. It not only endures, but also enlarges itself with the dawn of eternity.—*Goulburn.*

(β) It is not indeed denied that Christians may be, and often are, placed in a desolate and uncomfortable worldly position. But we maintain that the circumstances of their condition cannot affect or modify that peace and joy, whose seat is internal, and its source heavenly. The children of God, when suffering from outward sources of disquietude, have been compared to a person in vigorous and strong health, reposing upon a rough and hard pallet. The physical discomfort of such a person arises exclusively from his position. Health, however, enables him, in great measure, to triumph over the uneasiness. The prosperous worldling, on the other hand, admits of comparison to an invalid, laid upon a bed of down, in the lap of luxury and comfort. All his outward resources, his purple, and fine linen, and sumptuous fare, cannot send through his frame the thrilling glow, the delightful sensation of health. The Christian has that possession of moral health which the votary of this world lacks, even at the zenith of his prosperity; and from this possession he cannot be disinherited, however unfavourable may be the turns which his temporal circumstances may take.—*Goulburn.*

(γ) "*This shall ye have at My hand.*" So runs the solemn admonition: "Ye shall lie down in sorrow." As if the Lord had said, Though now ye run to and fro in search of fresh stimulants, and engage yourselves ardently in pursuits which may divert the mind from the consciousness of its own desolate and empty state, a time must come when the spirit of enterprise, which has urged you to these pursuits, must cool—when failing health and a breaking constitution shall make it impossible for you to escape any longer from a calm survey of that which is before you. Sooner or later you must lie down perforce upon a deathbed, where both prospect and retrospect shall fill you with dismay. Then shall the torchlights of worldly enjoyments, in whose brightness ye have walked, pale their ineffectual fires before the sobering dawn of Eternity. They shall be viewed in all their vanity, as mere temporary expedients,—sorry substitutes indeed for heaven's sunlight in the soul. Bitterly shall ye deplore and accuse yourselves for your folly in having been attracted by their delusive brilliancy. And so, while My servants have hope in their end, *your* lying down shall be in sorrow.—*Goulburn.*

The Difference between True and False Conversion.

l. 11. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, &c.*

I. *The natural state of man is a state of pure selfishness, i.e.*, the unconverted have no Gospel benevolence. Selfishness is regarding one's own happiness supremely, and seeking one's own good because it is his own. He who is selfish places his own happiness above other interests of greater value; such as the glory of God and the good of the universe. That mankind, before conversion, are in this state, is evident from many considerations.

II. *In a converted state, the character is that of benevolence.* Benevolence is loving the happiness of others, or rather, choosing the happiness of others. Benevolence is a compound word, that properly signifies good-willing. This is God's state of mind. We are told that God is love; that is, He is benevolent. Benevolence comprises His whole character.

III. *True conversion is a change from a state of supreme selfishness to benevolence.* It is a change in the end of pursuit, and not a mere change in the means of attaining the end. A man may change his means, and yet have the same end, his own happiness. He may do good for the sake of the temporal benefit. Now, every one can see that there is no virtue in this. It is the *design* that gives character to the act, not the means employed to effect

the design. The true and the false convert differ in this.

IV. *Some things in which true saints and deceived persons may agree, and some things in which they differ.* 1. They may agree in leading a strictly moral life. The difference is in their motives. 2. They may be equally prayerful, so far as the form of praying is concerned. The difference is in their motives. 3. They may be equally zealous in religion. One may have great zeal, because he sincerely desires and loves to promote religion, for its own sake. The other may show equal zeal, for the sake of having his own salvation more assured, and because he is afraid of going to hell if he does not work for the Lord, or to quiet his conscience, and not because he loves religion for its own sake. 4. They may be equally conscientious in the discharge of duty; the true convert because he loves to do duty, and the other because he dare not neglect it. 5. Both may pay equal regard to what is right; the true convert because he loves what is right, and the other because he knows he cannot be saved unless he does right. 6. They may agree in their desires in many respects, but with different motives. 7. They may agree in their resolutions, but with different motives. 8. They may also agree in their designs. They may both really design to glorify God. One chooses it as an end, the other as a means to promote a selfish end. 9. They may agree in their affection towards many objects:—the Bible, God, Christ, Christians; but with different motives. 10. So they may both rejoice in the same things. 11. Both may mourn and feel distressed at the low state in the Church. 12. Both may love to attend religious meetings. 13. Both may find pleasure in the duties of the closet. 14. They may both love the doctrines of grace. 15. They may both love the precepts of God's law. 16. They may be equally liberal in giving to benevolent societies. 17. They may be equally self-denying in many things. 18. They may both be willing to suffer martyrdom. In all these cases, the motives of one class are directly against the other. The difference lies in the choice of different *ends*. One chooses his own interest, the other chooses God's interest as his chief end.

Here is the proper place to answer an inquiry, which is often made: "*If these two classes of persons may be alike in so many particulars, how are we to know our own real character, or to tell to which class we belong?* I answer—1. If we are truly benevolent it will appear in our daily transactions. 2. If you are disinterested in religion, religious duties will not be a task to you. 3. If selfishness is the prevailing character of your religion, it will take sometimes one form and sometimes another. 4. If you are selfish, your enjoyment in religion will depend mainly on the strength of your hopes of heaven, and not on the exercise of your affections. 5. If you are selfish in your religion, your enjoyments will be chiefly from anticipation. The true saint already enjoys the peace of God, and heaven has begun in his soul. 6. Another difference is, that the deceived person has only a purpose of obedience, and the other has a preference of obedience. 7. The true convert and the deceived person also differ in their faith. The true saint has a confidence in the general character of God, that leads him to unqualified submission to God. The other has only a partial faith, and only a partial submission. 8. If your religion is selfish, you will rejoice particularly in the conversion of sinners, where your own agency is concerned in it, but will have very little satisfaction in it, where it is through the agency of others (H. E. I. 327–334).

V. *Answers to some objections made against this view of the subject. Objection* 1. Am I not to have any regard to my own happiness? *Answer.* It is right to regard your own happiness according to its relative value. And again, you will, in fact, promote your own happiness, precisely in proportion as you leave it out of view.

Objection 2. Did not Christ regard the joy set before Him? And did not Moses also have respect unto the re-

compense of reward? And does not the Bible say, we love God because He first loved us? *Answer* (1.) It is true that Christ despised the shame and endured the cross, and had regard to the joy set before Him. Not His own salvation, &c. *Answer* (2.) So Moses had respect to the recompense of reward. But was that his own comfort? Far from it. The recompense of reward was the salvation of Israel. What did he say? "If Thou wilt forgive their sin," &c. *Answer* (3.) Where it is said, "We love Him because He first loved us," the language plainly bears two interpretations; either that His love to us has provided the way for our return and the influence that brought us to love Him, or that we love Him for His favour shown to ourselves. That the latter is not the meaning is evident, because Jesus Christ has so expressly reprobated this principle in His Sermon on the Mount: "If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? Do not the publicans the same?" If we love God, not for His character, but for His favours to us, Jesus Christ has written us reprobate.

Objection 3. Does not the Bible offer happiness as the reward of virtue? *Answer.* The Bible speaks of happiness as the result of virtue, but nowhere declares virtue to consist in the pursuit of one's own happiness, &c.

Objection 4. God aims at our happiness, and shall we be more benevolent than God? &c. *Answer.* This objection is specious, but futile and rotten. God is benevolent to others. And to be like Him we must aim at, that is, delight in His happiness and glory, according to their real value.

Objection 5. Do not the inspired writers say, "Repent, and believe the Gospel, and you shall be saved?" *Answer.* They say, The penitent shall be saved, but it must be disinterested repentance and submission.

Objection 6. Does not the Gospel hold out pardon as a motive to submission? *Answer.* That depends on the sense in which you use the term *motive.*

CONCLUSION.—1. We see, from this subject, why it is that professors of religion have such different views of the nature of the Gospel. 2. We see why some people are so much more anxious to convert sinners, than to see the Church sanctified and God glorified by the good works of His people. —*C. G. Finney: Lectures to Professing Christians,*" pp. 133–145.

THE DUTY AND THE BENEFITS OF RETROSPECTION.

li. 1. *Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness, &c.*

These words were addressed to the pious remnant of true believers among the Jews. They were in an afflicted and discouraged state, and needed appropriate direction and support. What help does the prophet give them? He bids them candidly and closely compare past things with present circumstances, and thus see whether there was not ground for consolation and encouragement; for this is the meaning and object of the figurative exhortation in the text. Were they grieved and discouraged at the depressed condition of the Church? Let them call to mind how small its beginnings had been, how unpromising its commencement; the Lord "called Abraham alone," as a single individual, and yet had so blessed and increased him, that out of this "rock" the whole nation and Church of Israel had been produced. He who had done so much for Israel, could He not do more? Reflections of this nature would tend to instruct and comfort them under existing circumstances; would point out their duty, and minister consolation.

From this counsel addressed to the Jews, I infer that in like manner *it is the duty, and will be for the benefit of every true servant of God, occasionally to reflect on his own original state, on the*

rise and progress of religion in his own soul, and on the experience which he has thus individually had of the Divine power, goodness, and mercy. Such retrospection will tend to the increase of many graces in his soul:—

1. *Humility.* It will not be possible for him to think of what he was, without feelings of self-abasement; without a check being given to that unholy pride which is so apt to spring up in every breast.

2. *Contentment.* No man who remembers from what a pit of corruption he was taken by Divine grace will complain that a more elevated, conspicuous, and honourable position in the Church has not been allotted him. If he has been made so much as "a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord," he will give thanks.

3. *Lowly dependence on Divine help.* A survey of his spiritual history will lead him to say with the apostle (1 Cor. xv. 10), and to feel how much he needs the same Divine help to enable him to "hold the beginning of confidence steadfast unto the end."

4. *Courage.* When he remembers how God has helped him in all his troubles, and delivered him in all his temptations, and ministered to all his necessities, he will dismiss all fears as to the future, and will say with wisdom, what the ungodly say in their folly, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be" (Eccles. i. 9).—*Edward Cooper: Practical and Familiar Sermons*, vol. iv. 327–346.

These words were intended to encourage God's ancient people in their expectations of deliverance from the calamities that had befallen them on account of their sins. They are addressed to the pious portion of the people. They introduce the prophecy which is continued to chap. lii. 12. The prophet begins by meeting the fear that the difficulties in the way of so great a deliverance were too formidable. He refers to the origin of the nation, and bids the people mark how much greater difficulties had been overcome. Abraham had been called out of Ur of the Chaldees, to be the founder of their race. Sarah was old and unlikely to have a child. Yet a son was born to them, and in the course of time the promise of a numerous posterity was fulfilled (ver. 2). And if there are difficulties now in the way; if their iniquity is enormous, and if the power of Babylon is overwhelming, He who overcame the former difficulties can overcome these.

The words of the text are applicable still. Here is

I. A DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

"Ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord." Two objects of pursuit are pointed out: the "Lord" and "righteousness." They represent the character of the persons described, and their relation to God. These are the two things comprehended in all earnest religion. They suppose

1. *Appreciation.* He who is earnest in religion has compared a happy relation to God, and the possession of the righteousness that distinguishes His people, with the world and sin. He has found the world worthless. He cannot be happy in sin. He finds that his happiness needs deliverance from it, and a conscious interest in God as his Father and his Friend.

2. *Effort.* Therefore he "seeks the Lord," he "follows after righteousness." How does he do this? He whose mind is set on the attainment of an end that commends itself as valuable to him, pursues it by all suitable means. If it is the student seeking knowledge, the sick man seeking health, the ambitious man seeking position, or the business man seeking money, he spares no effort until his end be gained. And he who earnestly desires the possession of spiritual blessings will make every suitable effort. He will consult the Scriptures, frequent the ministry of the Gospel, labour for the removal of obstacles, pray for divine acceptance, comply with the divine command to repent and believe.

3. *Progression.* "Follow." "Seek."

As this is a permanent description, it supposes that however much of God and His righteousness may be obtained as the result of effort, the point is never reached at which further possession of spiritual blessing and further discovery of God are impossible and needless. There is room for a growing attainment to the end of life. Christians desire advancement on to perfection. They are directed to "grow in grace," to "press toward the mark."

II. A DIRECTION TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

"Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged."

1. What is involved in this remembrance? Great as they had become—a people built into a magnificent palace—they lay in the rude quarry until the Divine Workman digged them out. At that time none could foresee what they would become. And we are now Christians; but we were not always such. This spiritual habitation of God once lay in the cold rock of fallen, ruined nature. We should remember the sins we at that time committed, the evil propensities and habits we indulged, which were the special barriers in the way of our conversion. We should remember evil surroundings—such as companionships, business influences, exposure to temptation, which increased the difficulty. We should remember that we are what we are, not by the development of good principles always strong in our nature, but by the conversion of our nature, which was accomplished by nothing less than the power of God.

2. What advantage is this remembrance? (1.) *It preserves and deepens humility.* Persons who have rapidly risen in the world sometimes assume airs which constrain observers to say that they have forgotten what they once were. A celebrated minister, who in early life had been a working stonemason, is said to have kept in his study, through a long life, the tools with which he had worked, so that he could look at them whenever he was unduly lifted up. The apostle Paul looked back to what he was previous to his conversion (1 Tim. i. 13). God might have left us to ourselves to wander farther from Him. But for the grace of God we might have been to-day as bad as the worst men we know. Those have not right views of the degrading evil of sin who can boast of their former exploits in sin, or so speak of them as to excite the mirth of the listener. If we had committed a great crime against human society and law, we should never think or speak of it without shame.

(2.) *It magnifies the grace of God.* The work by which we passed from darkness into light was the work of the Divine Spirit. Every regenerated soul has been an object of Divine thought from eternity. The beautiful stone you pick up on the shore has been rolled and polished by the waters in the course of ages. Geologic changes that brought the earth to its present form are interesting to the student because of their high antiquity. But their age is as nothing to Him whose goings forth have been of old from everlasting. Pieces of rock are found which, when split open, display the very slant of the rain-drop which fell on the sandstone of a primæval period. But what if one were to find, on such a stone, an inscription referring back to thoughts of love concerning him which were entertained in that distant past? Those thoughts were entertained. They have been carried into effect. Let your thankful song arise.

(3.) *It encourages Christian faith and hope.* There are difficulties, temptations, weaknesses between us and the great future that is promised. But Israel was encouraged to trust by looking back on the way God had led them and their fathers. See what He has done for you, and believe in the preservation, the resurrection, the heaven. And thus encourage others as well as yourselves. "In me first." Encourage coming sinners.

Are you hewn? or still in the quarry? Resist not Him who would dig you out.—*J. Rawlinson.*

Introduction, see preceding outlines.

I. THE CHARACTERS ADDRESSED.

1. *Followers of righteousness.* That is righteousness of character, obtained in justification (Rom. iv. 24). Righteousness of nature, received in regeneration (1 John iii. 9). Righteousness of practice, displayed in the acts and exercises of an obedient life (1 John iii. 7). Those who have been justified and regenerated, follow after righteousness—prayerfully, diligently, and progressively.

2. *They that seek the Lord.* This is sometimes put for the commencement of religion, and sometimes for the sum of it. The latter sense is the meaning of the text. Their desires are after God. His face and favour they constantly prize and seek. They seek—(1.) The blessing of God in prayer. (2.) The presence of God in ordinances. (3.) The smile of God in duties. (4.) The aid of God in difficulties. (5.) The approbation of God in all things.

II. THE DUTIES ENJOINED.

1. *Attention.* "Hearken unto me." God is our *Sovereign*, and He claims our subjection and attention; we are to hearken to all His laws and precepts. He is our *Redeemer;* and we are to hearken to all the statements of His grace and mercy. He is our *Friend;* and we are to hearken to all His advice and counsel. We are to hearken to Him as He addresses us through His works, providences, word, servants, and especially through His Son and Spirit. We are to hearken to Him on all subjects and at all times—humbly, affectionately, cheerfully.

2. *Retrospection.* "Look to the rock," &c. Observe—(1.) Our original state. A part of the common "rock" of depravity—hard, cold, inflexible. In the "hole of the pit" (Ps. xl. 1). Pit of depravity and defilement, misery, imminent peril, utter human helplessness. (2.) Our present state. Hewn from the rock. Digged out of the pit. God saw, and pitied, and saved us. By His word and Spirit He made us soft and tender; and He exalted us, justified us, &c. How great, total, blessed the change! (3.) Our present duty is to "look unto the rock," &c. We should look, and be humble, grateful, obedient, useful, watchful, that we are not again entangled in that yoke of bondage.

Application. The sinfulness, misery, and danger of mankind by nature. The goodness of God, and the efficiency of His grace. The grateful remembrance of His mercy, which His people should cultivate.—*Four Hundred Sketches and Skeletons*, 6th ed., vol. ii. pp. 187–189.

A BRIGHT LIGHT IN DEEP SHADES.

li. 1. *Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.*

The Israelites were commanded to remember all the way which the Lord their God had led them in the wilderness. The remembrance of God's mercy in the past will often prove bracing to our souls. Should we become rich and increased in goods spiritually, it will humble us and keep us in our right place, if we remember that once we were naked, and poor, and miserable. It will also excite our thankfulness. God's people are always happy when they are grateful. We should be ten times more full of bliss if we were proportionately more full of thankfulness. We bury God's mercies, and then sigh for His comforts.

In this particular instance Isaiah was led by the Spirit of God to admonish the Israelites to look back, that they might be cheered in a time of gloom and sadness, and animated with fresh confidence in God's power to bring them up again from their sad condition, as they thought of all that He had done for them when they were even in a worse plight.

I. THE TEXT IN ITS APPLICATION TO

ISRAEL LITERALLY. They are bidden to look back to the origin of their nation, in order that they may be comforted.

Abraham was the stock out of which the nation of Israel came. He was only one man. "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you, for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." From these two, who seemed the least likely of all flesh and blood, God was pleased to create a people countless as the stars. You say, "God can never restore us, we have been thinned out by innumerable invasions; the sword of war hath slain the tribes; Judah and Israel can never rise again." But are there not more left of you than there were at first? There were but two, Abraham and Sarah that bare you, and yet God made you a people. Can He not make you a people again? You are not lower now than you were then. You say that you are in poverty; true, but these your progenitors were not great on the earth. You say that you have no strength, that the men of valour have ceased, and that you are not skilful in the use of arms. Be it so, neither were your first ancestors expert in war; they were but few and feeble in the land, yet God preserved them, wrought great deliverances for them, and brought the country to great strength and power; and cannot He who did this for them do the same again for you, now that He promises to visit you and to restore you?

The thoughts which would be awakened in the heart of a Jew by these reflections would be eminently consolatory. They ought to be consolatory to us now with regard to the Jewish people. We are encouraged, from the very origin of Israel, to hope that great things shall yet be done for her.

II. OUR TEXT MAY BE USED IN REFERENCE TO THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH. Let us look back to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence Christ's Church was digged. We shall see great encouragement under present discouragements if we do so.

Many of the people of God scarcely dare look for brighter times, because they say the people of God are few. Nominal professors abound, but vital godliness, say they, where shall we find it? Hope in thy God! Was not the Church very small at first? It could all be contained in one upper room. But did not the Lord strengthen His Church in the apostolic times? How speedily did the 120 grow to 3000! How soon the 3000 multiplied a hundredfold! How soon all nations felt the growing power of the Church! And, in the dark ages, God had but to speak by His servant Luther, and brave men came to his side, and right soon His Church sprang up. Look back, then, if discouraged with the fewness of God's people, to the rock whence the Church was hewn.

"But is it possible," you say, "while the Church of God in these days possesses so few men of influence?" Was it not said that it should be so of old? Did not inspiration say, "Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty have been called, but God hath chosen the poor of this world"? Do ye suppose that God has changed His plans, or that men's hearts have changed their bias? It will be so to the end of the chapter.

"But alas!" saith one, "I see grave cause for sorrow, for in these days many have departed from the faith, and truth lies in the streets bespattered." It is even so. The times are dark and ominous, and thick clouds are gathering; but for all this there is no room for fear. Put not thine hand upon the ark of the Lord, like Uzzah, for God will preserve it; it is safe in His keeping. There have been eras and epochs in which gross heresies spread a contagion through the entire Church. The period at which Arianism was so prominent comes at once to our recollection. That Christ was merely a man was almost the universal belief of Christendom. Only a few faithful ones maintained His Godhead at all hazards. But, to-day, where is Arianism? It has gone among the moles and the bats; the few that held the truth survived the deadly epidemic, and won the victory after all.

In the dark ages Romanism was not only predominant, but it seemed to be and it really was all but universal; yet by the bright shining of His revealed word, did not God soon chase away the dense shades of ignorance and superstition? So will it be again.

Again, some brother cries, "It is not merely that error spreads in the land, but the Church is lukewarm in these times." The indictment is true. Still I see no cause for our being dispirited. The Church has been in a like listless state before, and out of that languid condition God has roused her up and brought her forth.

III. OUR TEXT MAY BE VIEWED AS INSTRUCTIVE TO OURSELVES. To some of God's people there come hours of terrible despondency (ch. i. 10). Let them, then, remember the pit of corruption out of which they were dug The same merciful and almighty power is ready to enable them to keep to the paths of righteousness, and to chase away the darkness that distresses them. Let them look back to what God has done for them, and then they will learn to look forward with hope.

IV. OUR TEXT MAY BE FITTINGLY USED TO ENCOURAGE OUR HOPE FOR OTHERS. Suffer not your thoughts about the character of any man you are trying to save to damp your ardour. Do not say, "I am afraid *his* is a hopeless case." Look unto the rock whence *you* were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence *you* were digged. The same grace that sufficed for you will suffice for him. Therefore, work on!—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1050.

A SIGHT FOR DESPONDING CHRISTIAN WORKERS.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

li. 2, 3. *Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah, &c.*

It is habitual with some persons to spy out the dark side of every question or fact; they fix their eyes upon the "waste places," and they study them till they know every ruin, and are familiar with the dragons and the owls. They sigh most dolorously that the former times were better than these, and that we have fallen upon most degenerate days. This habit is injurious, because it greatly discourages; and anything that discourages an earnest worker is a serious leakage for his strength. Depressing views often afford an apology for indifference and inaction. The smallest peg suffices to hang an excuse upon when we are anxious to escape from the stern service of faith. It is therefore a dreadful thing when the Church begins to be discouraged, and means must be used to stay the evil. Such means we would use this day. Lo, we lift the standard of the Divine purpose. Remember, ye that are cast down, that there are other voices besides those of the bittern and owl from the "waste places." Hearken to Him who promises to make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert like the garden of the Lord. Gaze no longer at the thirsty land and the burning sky; turn your eye where the finger of the Lord points by His word. "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you;" for there we may find comfort.

I. THE ORIGINAL OF GOD'S ANCIENT PEOPLE.

1. *The founder of God's first people was called out of a heathen family* (Josh. xxiv. 2). He was a dweller in Ur of the Chaldees, the city of the moon-god; and was called out from the place of his birth, and from the household to which he belonged, that in a separated condition, as a worshipper of the one God, he might keep the truth alive in the world. Why, then, might not the Lord, if the cause of truth were this day reduced to its utmost extremity, again raise up a church out of one man? He could call out another Abraham, and bless him and increase him, and achieve the whole of His eternal purposes, if all of us should sleep in the dust, and the visibly organised Church

of to-day should pass away as the snow of winter at the advent of spring. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Let us never dream that the God of Abraham is short of means for calling out chosen men to build up His Church. Surely Christian people should never doubt His power to raise up lights in dark places, when we remember that the greatest preacher of the gospel, namely, the apostle Paul, was drafted into the army of Christ from the ranks of its direst foes. As Luther came from among the monks, so out of Rome, yea, from the Vatican itself, can God, if He wills, call another Luther. Take this, then, for encouragement, ye who tremble for the ark of God; He can build up a spiritual house for Himself out of dark quarries, and find cedars for His temple in forests untraversed by the feet of missionaries.

2. *Abraham was but one man.* The Lord has, as a rule, wrought more nobly by one man than by bands and corporations of men. He in whose seed all nations are blessed was but one. "I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." Nor is this a solitary instance. When the earth was utterly corrupt God conserved the race by a solitary preacher of righteousness, who prepared an ark for the saving of his house. One Joseph saved whole nations from famine, and one Moses brought out a race from bondage. Who was there to keep Israel right when Moses fell on sleep but the one man Joshua? What were the prosperous times in the era of the Judges but days when one man was to the front as a leader? One man, standing like a figure at the head of many ciphers, soon headed victorious thousands, through faith in God. The Philistines had triumphed over the land if the one lad had not brought back Goliath's head, and if the one man had not again and again smitten the uncircumcised in the name of the Lord. Beloved, if we should ever be reduced, as we shall not be, to one man, yet by one man will God preserve His Church, and work out His great purposes. We may rightly measure quantities in reference to many things, but with others it is absurd. It would be ridiculous to measure the power of fire by the quantity which burns on your hearth. Give us fit materials and a single match, and you shall see what fire can do. Ye carry fire, ye servants of God, fire which fell at Pentecost; ye work with a heaven-sent force of boundless energy. Why, therefore, should you despair? If all the lights in the world were put out except a solitary lamp, there is enough fire in one wick to kindle all the lamps in the universe.

3. *This one man was a lone man.* He had not only to do the work of God, but he had nobody to help him. "I called him alone." True, he was attended by Lot, costing his noble uncle more trouble than he ever brought him profit. How little did he maintain or adorn the righteousness which, nevertheless, had saved him: true type of many a feeble professor in these days. Abraham was not backed by any society when he crossed the Euphrates and afterwards traversed the desert to sojourn in Canaan as a pilgrim and a stranger. If ever man was fairly cut adrift and cast upon the Lord, it was the great father of the faithful. He certainly found no patronage in his onward course save the all-sufficient patronage of the Lord his God. He had no prestige of parentage, rank, or title. He was in the fullest sense a lone man, unsupported by any of those outward distinctions which enable some men to do more than others.

The fulfilment of his calling rested on his loneliness. When he was alone God blessed Abraham,—"I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." My brother, if in the town or district where you live you seem to lose all your helpers; if they die one by one, and it seems as if nobody would be left to you; if even the prayer meeting fails for want of earnest, pleading men, still persevere, for it is the lone man that God will bless. You are learning sympathy with that lone Man in Gethsemane, with that lone Man upon the cross,

who there vanquished all our foes. "I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." Grasp that, ye that dwell remote from human sympathy. Oh that our missionaries abroad my feel the rich comfort of this fact! for they full often, like lone sentinels, keep watch with eyes that long to see a friend. They are separated from intercourse with brethren, they miss the friendships which tend to comfort and confirm, but it is God that calls them alone, and He will bless them and increase them.

Here is the sum and substance of this first head of my discourse: in looking to the rock whence we are hewn, we see the Lord working the greatest results from apparently inadequate causes. This teaches us to cease from calculating means, possibilities, and probabilities, for we have to deal with God, with whom all things are possible. Almighty God can assuredly do whatever He says He will do. If all the things that are have been spoken into existence by God alone, by His mere word, can He not yet build up His Church, even if on her earthly side there should seem to be no material with which to raise her walls?

II. THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS CHOSEN MAN. The text says, "Look," &c.; and it must mean,—consider him, and see what he was, that you may learn from him. His grand characteristic was *his faith*. Here is his epitaph:—"Abraham believed God." That was a mainspring of all his acts, the glory of his life. The men that God will work by, whatever else they have not, must have faith in God. Though it is to be desired that the believer should have every mental and moral qualification, yet it is astounding how, if there be real faith, a multitude of imperfections are swallowed up, and the man is still a power. I would mention Samson as an extreme case. Morally the feeblest of men, and the least fitted to be a judge in Israel; but oh, what faith! And what wonders it achieved!

Abraham's faith was such that it led him to *obedience*. He was called to go out, and he went, not knowing whither he went. It led him to *perseverance;* for once in God's way he did not leave it, but still abode a sojourner with God. It led him to *expectancy;* he looked for the promised seed, and not only for an Isaac but for the Messiah. So clear was the vision of his expectancy that before his eyes Christ was set forth, visibly.

The like faith also dwelt in the breast of Sarah; and as we are told in the text to look to Sarah as well as Abraham, let us not fail to do so. The faith of Sarah was not little when she left home with her husband; forsaking her kith and kin from love to God, and to him whom she called "lord." Nor did the trial of her faith end with the moving; she had to take up with tent life and all its inconveniences. Certain people look upon faith as a fine, airy, sentimental thing with which to roam among the stars, anticipate millenniums, and enjoy yourself in lofty contemplation. I believe far more in a faith which, whether it eats or drinks, does all to the glory of God; faith which like Sarah dwells in the tent and works there; faith which is cheerful over a scanty meal and drives away the fear of want; faith which can come down in life from the mansion to the cottage, if providence so decrees. From Abraham's comfortable home at Ur to his gipsy wanderings in Palestine the change must have been great, but Abraham may not have felt it one half as much as Sarah, for men can rough it and live out of doors, but the housewife knows all about it, and great was her faith that she never raised a question about the propriety of her husband's course of life: and though she laughed when she was told that she should bear a son, yet remember that in the eleventh of Hebrews it is written—"Through faith also Sarah herself received strength." She was the mother of Isaac, not in the power of the flesh, but the energy of faith; therefore look at her, as the text bids you.

Mark well this fact—that the characteristic of the person whom God will

bless is that he believes and acts upon his belief. Why is this? Because *faith is the only faculty of our spirit which can grasp God's ideal.* The ideas of God are as high above us as the heavens are above the earth: and therefore it is not by any fancied vastness of our feeble minds that we can ever rise into fellowship with God. There is a capacity about faith for grasping Divine promises and purposes, a width, a breadth, a height, a depth, which can hold the infinite truth as no other power can do. Love alone can rival it, for it embraces the infinite God Himself. With the far-reaching plans and promises of God faith alone is fit to deal; carnal reason is altogether out of the lists.

Faith, too, has a great power of reception, and therein lies much of her adaptation to the Divine purpose. Self-confidence, courage, resolution, cool reasoning, whatever else they are good at, are bad at humbly receiving. Those vessels which are full already are of no use as receivers; but faith presents her emptiness to God, and opens her mouth that God may fill it.

Again, *faith always uses the strength that God gives her.* Pride would vapour with it, and doubt would evaporate it; but faith is practical, and economically uses the talent entrusted to her.

Faith, too, can wait the Lord's time and place. When faith is weak, men are in a dreadful hurry. "He that believeth shall not make haste": that is to say, he shall not be ashamed or confounded by present trials so as to rush upon unbelieving actions. Faith leaves times and seasons with God, to whom they belong.

God loveth faith and blesseth it too, because *it giveth Him all the glory.* You do not believe God, if you boast of what you are doing: least of all do you believe, if you pride yourself in your faith; for faith is not mistrustful of her God but of herself. Faith looks to God to keep her alive as well as to fulfil the promise that He has made to her.

This, then, is the kind of faith which was characteristic of Abraham, and the question is, Have we got it? Have we so much of it that God can largely bless us? The comfort is that, if we have it not, the author of faith can give it to us, and if we have it in scant measure He can increase it.

You who do not believe that missions will succeed; you who readily become discouraged and discourage others; I beg you go home and seek more faith. We cannot go down to the battle with such soldiers as you; you do but encumber the host. The men that lapped are the only ones that Gideon will take to war. Send the fearful ones to the rear and let them take care of the baggage, so that when the battle is won they may have a share of the spoil, according to David's law. For actual service and warfare we must have men of faith. Cromwell found that when his men came dressed in all sorts of suits and colours they were apt to injure one another in the mêlée, and so he put them all in uniform. The uniform of the Prince Immanuel is faith: no man may call himself a soldier of the Cross who hath it not.

III. God effected His purpose, and raised up a chosen nation out of one man, whose chief characteristic was his faith: now notice OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THAT ONE MAN. There is a relation between us and Abraham: "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Something, surely, is expected of the children of such a man as Abraham. Great mountains are often succeeded by low valleys. Perhaps that is the case with you; but it should not be so. The natural seed were cut off because they had no faith: let not those who are grafted in, think to do without it. It is by faith that you are a son at all. You disprove your pedigree, if you stagger at God's promises.

Because we are the seed of Abraham, the apostle declares that the blessing of Abraham has come upon us also. Friends and labourers in our Missionary Society, grasp the blessing of Abraham! Here is the substance

of it—"Surely blessing, I will bless thee; and in multiplying, I will multiply thee." That is the grand old covenant promise, and it belongs to the Church. The blessing of the Church is the increase of the Church. The two go together.

We long to be multiplied—and we shall be, if we have faith in our God. The success of truth is the battle of the Lord, and the increase of His Church is according to His own promise; therefore in quietness we may possess our souls.

IV. CONSIDER OUR POSITION BEFORE ABRAHAM'S GOD. Do not let anything that I have said about Abraham for a moment take your mind off from the Lord Himself, because the pith of it all lies here—"*I* called him alone." Look to Abraham, but only as to the rock from which the Lord quarried His people: your main thought must be Jehovah Himself. Look unto the everlasting God who doeth great wonders, and stay yourselves upon Him.

Joyfully recollect that *the Lord our God has not changed.* This God of Abraham is still almighty, and still in the midst of the covenanted ones. Our behaviour towards Him, therefore, should resemble that of Abraham; we must never dishonour the Lord by unbelief. Doubt everything but God. This the everlasting decree which none can change—Christ must reign; He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied; the kings of the earth must bow before Him. Do not doubt it, for God has sworn by His own life that all flesh shall see His glory. Here is the grand argument for strong faith.

The covenant of God has not changed. Read the covenant words, and write them upon the door-posts of your Mission-House, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." This is the covenant with the spiritual seed of Abraham, and it has never been revoked. We read it now in clearer light, and understand better the fulness of its provisions. Therefore let us cry, "Remember Thy word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope."

You know more of God than Abraham could know; I beseech you then, trust Him, at least up to the level of the patriarch. How shall we forge an excuse, if we do not? What can excuse us if we distrust so glorious a God. Let us then act in daily life as those who do believe Him. Some people have a faith which is for show, a Sunday faith, faith that cannot bear the wear and tear of everyday life; varnished and gilded, but with no pure metal in it. The faith of Abraham could lead strings of camels and flocks of sheep away from Haran to Canaan. His was the faith which could drive the tent-pin into a foreign soil, or roll up the canvas and seek another unknown halting-place. In the Lord's work of evangelising the world you must have a downright, practical faith; not a faith that will sing when the organ begins to play, and then be so busy fumbling the hymn paper as to forget the collection: not the faith of those who boast of Carey, and Marshman, and Knibb, but whose own names never appear in the subscription list for a single shilling: not a faith which sings—

"Fly abroad, thou mighty Gospel,"

but never lends a bit of down to make a feather for its wings.

"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." If you doubt it, dissolve your Missionary Society, and do not pretend to do a work in which you have no faith; but if you believe in the triumph of God's work, and that you are called to it, behave worthily to so divine an enterprise.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1596.

SARAH AND HER DAUGHTERS.

(A Sermon for Christian Households.)

li. 2. "*Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you.*"
1 Pet. iii. 6. "*Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.*"

1. *What a happy circumstance it is when a godly, gracious man has an equally godly and gracious wife!* It is ill when there is a radical difference between husband and wife,—when one fears God, and the other has no regard to Him. What a pain it is to a Christian woman to be yoked with an unbelieving husband. The same must be the case of a husband who has an ungodly wife. However much God may bless him in all other respects, there seems to be a great miss there, as if a part of the sun were eclipsed,—that a part of life which should be all light is left in thick darkness! Oh, let those of us who have the happiness of being joined together in the Lord, thank and bless God every time they remember each other. Abraham had cause to praise God for Sarah, and Sarah was grateful for Abraham. I have not the slightest doubt that Sarah's character owed its excellence very much to Abraham: I should not wonder, however, if we discover, when all things are revealed, that Abraham owed as much to Sarah. Our first text bids us, "Look to Sarah," and we do look on her, and we thank God if we, like Abraham, are favoured with holy consorts, whose amiable tempers and loving characters tend to make us better servants of God.

2. *God does not forget the lesser lights.* Abraham shines like a star of the first magnitude, and we do not at first sight observe that other star, with light so bright and pure, shining with milder radiance but with kindred lustre, close at his side. The light of of Mamre, which is known under the name of Abraham, resolves itself into a double star when we apply the telescope of reflection and observation. To the common eye Abraham is the sole character, and ordinary people overlook his faithful spouse, but God does not overlook. Our God never omits the good who are obscure. He who treasures the names of His apostles, notes also the women that followed in His train. He who marks the brave confessors and the bold preachers of the gospel, also remembers those helpers who labour quietly in the gospel in places of retirement into which the hawk's eye of history seldom pries. Let, therefore, those who count themselves to be of the tribe of Benjamin, to be little in Israel, never be discouraged on that account; for the Lord is too great to despise the little ones.

It would be well for us to imitate God in this: great men are often not good examples. I am sorry when, because men have been clever and successful, they are held up to imitation, though their motives and morals have been questionable. Learn not from the great but from the good: be not dazzled by success, but follow the safer light of truth and right. Some of the choicest virtues are not so much seen in the great as in the quiet, obscure life. Many a Christian woman manifests a glory of character that is to be found in no public man. I am sure that many a flower that is "born to blush unseen," and, as we think, to "waste its fragrance on the desert air," is fairer than the beauties which reign in the conservatory, and are the admiration of all. God has ways of producing very choice things on a small scale. As rare pearls and precious stones are never great masses of rock, but always lie within a narrow compass, so full often the fairest and richest virtues are to be found in the humblest individuals. Do not, there

fore, always be studying Abraham, the greater character. Does not the text say, "Look unto Abraham, your father, *and* unto Sarah that bare you?" You have not learned the full lesson of patriarchal life until you have been in the tent with Sarah, as well as among the flocks with her husband.

3. *Faith reveals itself in various ways.* Faith in Noah makes him a ship-builder; in Abraham it makes him a pilgrim and a stranger. Faith has many ways of working, and it works according to the condition and position of the person in whom it dwells. Sarah does not become Abraham, nor does Abraham become Sarah. Faith in Isaac does not make him the same royal man as Abraham: he is always tame and gentle rather than great and noble; he comes in like a valley between the two great hills of Abraham and Jacob. God does not by His grace lift us out of our place. A man is made gentle, but he is not made a fool. A woman is made brave, but grace never made her masterful and domineering. Sarah is beautified with the virtues that adorn a woman, while Abraham is adorned with all the excellences which are becoming in a godly man. According as the virtue is required, so is it produced. If Abraham walk before God and is perfect; if he smite the kings that have carried Lot captive, if he does such deeds of prowess as become a man; the selfsame faith makes Sarah walk before God in her perfectness, and she performs the actions which become her womanhood, and she too is written among the worthies of faith who magnified the Lord.

II. We are led by our second text to look at *the fruit of faith in Sarah.* There were two fruits of faith in Sarah,—she did well, and she was not afraid with any amazement.

1. It is said of her that *she did well*, "whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well."

She did well, 1. *As a wife.* She was all her husband could desire, and when, at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years, she at last fell on sleep, it is said that Abraham not only mourned for her, but the old man wept for her most true and genuine tears of sorrow.

2. *As a hostess.* It was her duty, as her husband was given to hospitality, to be willing to entertain his guests; and the one instance recorded is, no doubt, the representation of her common mode of procedure. She was always ready to lay herself out to perform that which was one of the highest duties of a God-fearing household in those primitive times.

3. *As a mother.* We are sure she did, because we find that her son Isaac was so excellent a man; and you may say what you will, but in the hand of God the mother forms the boy's character.

4. *As a believer*, and that is no mean point. As a believer, when Abraham was called to separate himself from his kindred, Sarah went with him. She would adopt the separated life too, and the same caravan which travelled across the desert with Abraham for its master had Sarah for its mistress. She continued with him, believing in God with perseverance. She believed God's promise with all her heart, for though she laughed once, because when the promise neared its realisation it overwhelmed her; it was but a slip for the moment, for it is written by the apostle in the eleventh of Hebrews, "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised." It was not by nature, but by faith, that Isaac was born.

Oh that all professing Christian people had a faith that showed itself in doing well! Sarah had this testimony from the Lord, that she did well; and her daughters ye are, all of you who believe, if ye do well. Be no discredit to your queenly mother.

5. She proved her faith by a second evidence,—*she was "not afraid with any amazement."* She was calm and quiet, and was not put in fear by any terror. There were several occasions in which she might have been much disquieted

and put about. The first was in the breaking-up of her house life. When they had to cross the Euphrates and get right away into a land which she knew nothing of; this must have been a sterner trial still. But it mattered not to her, she felt safe with her husband's God, and calmly journeyed on.

Then, though we do not hear much about her, we know that all those years she had to live in a tent. A very trying life for a housewife. Remember, they were dwelling in tents as pilgrims and strangers, not for one day, or two, not for a few days in a year, but for scores of years at a stretch.

Besides, the tribes around them were all of other religions and of other tastes and ways, and they would have slain Abraham and killed the whole company, if it had not been for a sort of fear that fell upon them, by which Jehovah seemed to say to them, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." But if she had not been a believing woman, she must have often been afraid with great amazement.

Then there was a special time when Abraham put on his harness and went to war. She is under no distress that her husband has gone, and all the herdsmen and servants round about the tents all gone, so that she is left alone with her women-servants. No; she sits at home as a queen, and fears no robbers, calmly confident in her God.

Then there came, a little after, that great trial of faith which must have touched Sarah, though its full force fell on Abraham. She observed the sudden disappearance of her husband, her son, and his servant. For a week nearly there was no Abraham and no Isaac. One would have thought she would have wandered about, crying, "Where is my husband, and where is my son?" But not so. She calmly waited, and said within herself, "If he has gone, he has gone upon some necessary errand, and he will be under God's protection; and God who promised to bless him and to bless his seed will not suffer any evil to harm him." So she rested quietly, when others would have been in dire dismay. We hear so little said about Sarah that I am obliged to picture what I feel she must have been, because human nature is so like itself, and the effect of events upon us is very like the effect which would have been produced upon the mind of Sarah.

Now, this is a point in which Christian women, and, for the matter of that, Christian men also, should seek to imitate Sarah.

What is this virtue? It is a calm, quiet trusting in God. It is freedom from fear, such as described in another place in these words: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." It is composure of mind, freedom from anxiety, the absence of fretfulness, and clean deliverance from alarm; so that, whatever happens, trepidation does not seize upon the spirit, but the heart keeps on at its own quiet pace, delighting itself in a faithful God. This is the virtue which is worth a king's ransom, and Sarah had it.

Who are to exercise this virtue? We are all to do so; but the text is specially directed to the sisterhood, because some of them are rather excitable, a little hysterical, and apt to be fearfully depressed and utterly carried away.

When is this virtue to be exercised by us? At all times. To keep up an equable frame of mind is a thing to aim at, even as the gardener desires an even temperature for his choice flowers. But this virtue especially serves in *time of trouble*, when a very serious trial threatens us. Then remember Sarah, "whose daughters ye are if ye are not afraid with any amazement."

What is the excellence of this virtue? (1.) It is *due to God* that we should not be afraid with any amazement. Such a God as we have ought to be trusted. Under the shadow of such a wing, fear becomes a sin. (2.) It is *most impressive to men.* I do not think anything is more likely to impress the ungodly than the quiet peace of mind

of a Christian in danger or near to death. If we can be happy then, our friends will ask, "What makes them so calm?" (3.) It is *most useful to ourselves;* for he who can be calm in time of trouble will be most likely to make his way through it. Napoleon's victories were to a large extent due to the serenity of that masterly warrior; and, depend upon it, it is so with you Christian people: you will win, if you can wait. Calmness of mind is the mother of prudence and discretion; it gives the firm foothold which is needful for the warrior when he is about to deal a victorious blow.

"*How can we obtain it?*" (1.) *It is an outgrowth of faith,* and you will have it in proportion as you have faith. Have faith in God, and you will not be afraid with any amazement. (2.) This holy calm comes, also, *from walking with God.* No spot is so serene as the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High. Commune with God, and you will forget fear.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,* No. 1633.

The Depression, Prosperity, and Delight of the Church.

li. 3. *For the Lord shall comfort Zion, &c.*

The doctrine that there is a Divine superintendence over the affairs and interests of man, is one on which every pious mind must fix a devout attention. This principle is especially interesting and important as it regards the Church—that spiritual body chosen by God, in order that, by its spiritual conformity and devotedness to Him, it may show forth His glory and praise.

There have been, and are, many circumstances which, did we regard them only in their immediate aspect, would encourage the complaint that "Zion is forgotten and forsaken." But along with her present circumstances, we ought to observe the predictions given by the Almighty with regard to her final destiny. Of those predictions the words of the text may furnish a striking instance, and will allow an extended illustration. Attention is here invited to—

I. The depression of the Church.

This is presented under the expressions: "the waste places of Zion," a "wilderness," and a "desert." In what did it consist? It arose from, 1. *The small number of those who belonged to it lived only two centuries.* Elijah, who was nearly contemporary with Isaiah, could discover absolutely none who adhered to the public worship of Jehovah (1 Kings xix. 10). These were the circumstances that called forth the lamentation of Isaiah (ch. lxiv. 6, 7). And in these days we are met by deep depression, arising from the fewness of those that believe. Even nominal Christianity has a limited area, and God's true Zion is in a very small minority. After the lapse of many ages, the confession is painfully true, "We are for God, but the whole world lieth in wickedness." The number of additions made to God's people are few and trivial, when compared with the means employed. "The bones are very many, and lo! they are very dry."

2. *A want of spiritual vigour on the part of those who belong to the Church* This is equally characteristic of the time in which our lot is cast. In many instances, the power of the truth over the passions and the life is so slender, that we can scarcely discern the form.

II. The prosperity of the Church.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion," &c. It is hard for us, living in a temperate climate, and generally cultivated country, to feel the full force of the prophet's metaphors. These in the text, and others (ch. xxxv. 1, 2; xli. 17, 20), open to us future periods in the history of the Church of God, when the causes of her depression being removed, she shall enjoy true prosperity. While there have been visits of mercy in times past, the grand time is still future. When it

will arrive, we know not (Acts i. 7). But in regard to the general truth, we rest upon the authority of the word of God. Observe—

1. *The source to which the prosperity of the Church is assigned.* "*The Lord* shall comfort Zion." There is a regular and uninterrupted affirmation of this grand principle in prophecy (ch. ii. 20, 21, ix. 7, xliv. 2–5; Zech. iv. 6, 7). In this dispensation we are called upon to remember that Christianity is emphatically "the ministration of the Spirit" (John iii. 5; Rom. viii. 9; 1 Cor. xii. 3, iii. 5–7). There must be the outpouring of the Spirit of God, or evil will still hold its wide tyranny.

2. *The nature of that prosperity by which the Church will be distinguished.* (1.) The increase of numbers will be incalculable (ch. xlix. 18–23, lx. 3–8). (2.) A great purification and refinement of the character of those who shall pertain to the Church will signalise those future days. The former prosperity would be imperfect without the latter.

3. *The means to be adopted by the true friends of the Church, in order that the period of this predicted prosperity may arrive.* (1.) The preaching and teaching of the gospel (Rom. x. 13–17). (2.) United and importunate prayer for the influences of the Spirit of God (ch. lxii. 6, 7; Ezek. xxxvi. 37; Matt. vii. 7, 8).

III. THE DELIGHT OF THE CHURCH. "Joy and gladness shall be found therein," &c. (lii. 8–10). This emotion may properly arise from contemplating, 1. *The wonderful change which shall have been accomplished in the condition of the Church itself.* She was depressed; now she is exalted, and sits enthroned as the representative of the Almighty, and of His power to rescue and to redeem.

2. *The connection between the prosperity of the Church and the glorification of God.* God is glorified by the conversion of every *individual* sinner; how much more, then, when a nation shall be born in a day, and when the whole earth shall be a Carmel!

3. *The connection between the prosperity of the Church and the happiness of mankind* (ch. xi. 6–9).

CONCLUSION: Do you belong to *the Church of God?* If so; then *labour in all the appointed means of instrumentality, which by the prosperity of the Church is to be secured.*—*James Parsons: The Pulpit*, vol. xviii. pp. 181–191.

COMFORT IN TROUBLE.

li. 3, 12, and lii. 9. *For the Lord shall comfort Zion, &c.*

The prophecy is addressed to those who are striving after the right kind of life and seeking Jehovah, and not turning from Him to make earthly things and themselves the object of their pursuits; for such only are in a condition by faith to regard that as possible, which seems impossible to human understanding, because the very opposite is lying before the eye of the senses (*Delitzsch*).

I. The people of God often stand in urgent need of Divine comfort. They not only have their full share of the sorrows which are common to humanity, but they have troubles to which the people of the world are strangers. Hence we are told that "many are the afflictions of the righteous," &c. The Saviour prepared His people for this: "In the world," &c., "Whosoever will be my disciple," &c. The people of God have to fight every inch of their way to heaven: "These are they," &c. Their chief sorrows spring from sources unknown to and incomprehensible by the world. They are *soul* sorrows, having their origin in the vivid views which they have of the evil of sin, and of their own individual guilt in the sight of God, &c. Sometimes they fear that after all they shall never reach the celestial Canaan. Therefore they have the need of all the comfort which can be given them on the way to heaven. (See pp. 2, 4, 386; *cf.* Rom.

vii. 22–24; Gal. v. 17, iv. 29; Rom. viii. 36; 2 Cor. iv. 8–14; 2 Tim. iii. 12; Ps. lxxxviii. 18; Prov. xvii. 1; Isa. xxxviii. 14, 15; 2 Tim. iv. 10, 16; Psa. li. 5–8; 2 Cor. vii. 5.)

II. It is God's will that His people should be comforted amid all their tribulations. "See how God resolves to comfort His people: 'I, even I, will do it.' He had ordered His ministers to do it (ch. xl. 1), but because they cannot reach the heart, He takes the work into His own hands. See how He glories in it; He takes it among the titles of His honour to be "the God that comforteth them that are cast down;" He delights in being so (*M. Henry*). Because *He would have His people happy.* His people should remember this, and cultivate the spirit of Christian cheerfulness, because, 1. *Uncomfortable Christians often dishonour the Lord.* 2. *Uncomfortable Christians cannot be as diligent as they ought to be in the duties of religion.* Working out their own salvation. Working for God in seeking to save others (Ps. li. 12, 13; P. D. 450–453).

III. The bestowment of Divine comfort inspires them with grateful and exultant joy (ver. 12, lii. 9). "Where there is joy and gladness to their satisfaction, it is fit there should be thanksgiving to God's honour; for whatever is the matter of their rejoicing, ought to be the matter of their thanksgiving, and the returns of God's favour ought to be celebrated with the voice of melody; which will be the more melodious when God gives songs in the night, songs in the desert" (*M. Henry*).

There may be elevated joy in the midst of deep affliction (Rom. v. 3; Phil. iii. 1, iv. 4, &c.) Eleven of the thirteen epistles of Paul begin with exclamations of praise and thanksgiving (2 Cor. i. 3, 4). Take to praising God under all circumstances, and thus you will lift your soul right out of your sorrow, and taste the pleasures of immortality. "In everything give thanks." Let this be your constant occupation. He well deserves our warmest praise.

CONCLUSION: 1. *The duty and privilege of believers to seek Divine comfort.* God has given us express assurances that it is His purpose that His people should have ample and unceasing comfort amid all their sorrows and sufferings (Isa. xl. 1, li. 3, 12; Phil. iii. 1, iv. 4). Most ungracious on our part not readily and gladly to receive the comfort so provided. To refuse to be comforted, is to be guilty of a frustration of the merciful purposes of God towards us.

2. *The duty and privilege of comforted believers to comfort others.* God comforts you, that you may comfort others—that He may use you as comforters. Experimental knowledge helps us to speak with authority and power—fits us to be able and ready comforters. What we have received we must give (2 Cor. i. 3, 4).—*Alfred Tucker.*

God will give His people, I. Consolation. II. Fruitfulness. III. Gladness.—*J. E. Page.*

PARADISE RESTORED.

li. 3. *For the Lord shall comfort Zion, &c.*

The Church is a garden planted by the Lord, luxuriant in beauty and fruitfulness, and filled with happy occupants. The promise is as yet only in process of fulfilment; and that we may look more clearly into the future, we are called to look into the past. Eden was the garden of the Lord, the primeval paradise, the place of consummate beauty and happiness, ere sin had blighted its joys and stained its purity. To make Zion like Eden is to bring back the vanished glories of that happy place. To the extent that this is accomplished, the Church is—

I. A PLACE OF DIVINE COMFORT AND FELLOWSHIP. No sooner do we press in by faith, through Christ, the door, than we enjoy the comforts of

Divine love, and are admitted to heavenly fellowships (Heb. vi. 18). Did Adam hear the voice of the Lord God? Here the intercourse is renewed. Life conducts through an Eden radiant with the Divine presence. What a change since the day when the Lord drove forth the man from Eden! That door has been again unbarred, and Christ has secured for us a welcome into a fairer paradise than that then was lost. The Church is "a habitation of God." Enter, then, and you will enjoy this rich comfort and lofty fellowship. So long as you stand outside, you cannot know the beauties of the garden; you cannot survey its landscapes, nor breathe its perfumes. God has not disowned and forsaken this fallen world: it is not, as we might have expected, desolated by His wrath: we can still find an Eden in it—a garden of God's presence and favour.

II. A PLACE OF HELPFUL SOCIAL LIFE. Such was the life of the first pair, and such would have been the life of their children, but for the entrance of sin. Alas, how that fact has altered the course of human history! What jarring discords in our domestic and social life! But if the Church is to be as Eden, human society will be regenerated: the love, peace, and helpful companionship that were found in the garden of the Lord will be restored, when this promise is accomplished to the full. The Church will yet leaven society with her principles of brotherly love and mutual help. The world around is like a wilderness, where the wild plants of nature grow in rank profusion. But God has engaged to reclaim Zion's waste places. This garden is ever extending its walls, and will do so till the whole earth becomes an Eden.

III. A PLACE OF JOY. "Joy and gladness shall be found therein." No jarring strife shall mar its harmony: love to God and to each other shall reign among the happy inmates of the restored Paradise. We naturally think of a garden as a place of joy. Surrounded by all that is fair and peaceful, the mind depressed by trial is relieved by the cheerful notes of the birds, the luxuriance of the foliage, and the forms and hues of the flowers. The Church of Christ is such a garden, in which we taste joys unknown by the world. "The fruit of the Spirit is joy,"—the joy of sin forgiven and heaven secured,—the joy of communion with Christ, and assurance of His love—the joy of mutual endearment and mutual service. What joy can surpass that which is the heritage of all who dwell within this happy inclosure?

IV. A SCENE OF WORSHIP. There shall be found therein "thanksgiving and the voice of melody." What a delightful exercise is that of praise! What a happy garden, ever jubilant with sacred song!

These, then, are the features of this garden of the Church. Not on earth can we behold them in all their perfection. The earthly paradise, reopened to us by Christ, will soon become the heavenly paradise (Rev. ii. 7, xxii. 1, 2). May we all at last become inmates of the Eden above, the paradise of beauty and splendour, the abode of love and joy and worship unending!—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE SALVATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

li. 6. *Lift up your eyes to the heavens, &c.*

There is no reason why we should not read these words in their positive and natural signification. Similar predictions (ch. xxxiv. 4; Ps. cii. 26; 2 Pet. iii. 10). These predictions are confirmed by the reasoning of the latest science; also by the analogy of every-day experience, which go to show that, though the laws of the universe may be uniform, the material existences are in constant flux.

The description is not given to excite feelings of dismay, but to enhance our confidence in the immutability of the

salvation and righteousness of God. We must first consider the one fact, that we may the better trust and enjoy the other.

I. THE WORLD PASSES.

We are called "to lift up our eyes" and to "look." The heavens and the earth have great lessons to teach us. Nature is God's prophetess. The spiritual man will see not only interesting geological facts, but also "*Sermons* in Stones." Nature is speaking to us by its progress towards dissolution.

1. *Astronomy points towards dissolution.* The earth is slowly cooling, and if the present process continues, it must be ultimately reduced to the lifeless condition of the moon. Meanwhile, the moon is gradually approaching the earth, and must ultimately fall into it. The same cause—the check given to centrifugal motion by friction with the universal ether—must fling the earth into the sun, and possibly bring all the stars together.

2 *Geology points towards dissolution.* It shows that successive orders of life have risen and spread and perished. And there is every reason to believe that, as it was in the beginning, so it will be to the end.

3. *History points towards dissolution.* Kingdoms have their day—and then their night. "Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, where are they?" Institutions perish. Fashions change.

4. *Common observation points towards dissolution.* Science may prolong life, and ameliorate its conditions; but it has done nothing towards stopping the natural "funeral marches to the grave." As life's shadows lengthen, and old comrades drop out of the ranks, men feel more sadly the unutterable changefulness of earthly things. Facts of such personal importance speak loudly to us to look for better, more enduring grounds of confidence.

II. THE SALVATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD ENDURE FOR EVER.

1. *They endure in Him.* The immutable laws of nature are just reflections of the eternal constancy of God. He must be changeless because He is perfect; "He is not a man that He should err." Immaculate and passionless, He can have no need to repent. (1.) His salvation endures for ever. Much that we love and trust passes away. We are ready to despair of all light and hope. But no! one thing endures. To the poor, dark, sin-stained, fallen soul, beggared of all earthly joy, and buried in grief and shame, one grand hope is left. Christ is still standing knocking at the door of the heart: salvation is still possible; for "He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him." (2.) God's righteousness will not be abolished. He can never connive at sin. There would be no hope for us if it were not that here the righteousness and sacrifice of Christ meet our need.

2. *The salvation and righteousness of God endure in us.* (1.) The salvation shall be for ever. Christ gives to us no temporary deliverance, but eternal salvation. There is one "friend that sticketh closer than a brother," and one haven that is safe in the wildest tempest. But the salvation endures on condition that we remain faithful (2.) The righteousness shall not be abolished. That is the one permanent possession to be sought for. Wealth, health, pleasure, friends, knowledge, the earth itself, and the very heavens pass away; he who has any of them for his heritage will be finally bankrupt; he who lives righteously in God's righteousness, shares the immortality of that righteousness.

TWO PRACTICAL LESSONS: 1. *Trust in God alone.*

"Change and decay in all around I see,
O Thou that changest not, abide with me."

2. *Fear no earthly evil.* (1.) Fear not the power of present foes. This power is doomed; with the glory of the world, its cruelty, its injustice, its wrong will perish. (2.) Fear not the loss of present blessings. To part with them will be a pain. But if we have God, and His salvation and righteousness, the best treasures are left.—*W. F. Adeney, M.A.: Clerical World*, vol. i. pp. 254–255.

The design of this chapter is to comfort the people of God under the persecution of their enemies, and the various evils of their present warfare. The ground of consolation insisted on in the text, is the perpetuity of God's mercy and faithfulness towards His people, which shall be manifested in accomplishing their salvation, protecting them from the assaults of their enemies, carrying them safely through all the chances and changes of this mortal life, and crowning them at length with victory and honour. And while they are led to expect this glorious end of their troubles and fears, they are assured that everything else that now appears so splendid and desirable shall perish like a vain shadow. "Lift up your eyes."

In treating upon these words, I shall endeavour to show the perishing nature of all worldly objects, pursuits, and comforts, and the stability of those which the Gospel proposes, and to which the attention of all true Christians is directed.—*W. Richardson, Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 377, 378.

We are here called to contrast the fading and short-lived glory of all things earthly, with the enduring character of those hopes and consolations revealed in the Gospel.

I. "All flesh is grass"—not like the oak, the cedar, the enduring tree of the forest, but "grass," which flourishes and dies within the compass of a season. As it is with man, so is it with his *works*. In vain the laborious master painted for eternity; in vain the skilful statuary inscribed his name, or inwrought his own image, with that of some divinity which he carved into stone; the colours of the picture are long since faded, the stone is mouldered or dashed into pieces. In vain the Egyptian tyrants raised a monument to their power and greatness, which might last as long as earth; the pile indeed stands, but the name of the builder is forgotten; and as for all the rest of all the boasted wonders of the world, the very ruins of them are lost and forgotten.(α) Nay, the sure and firm-set earth itself partakes of this character of mutability. The sun shines but for a season; the earth crumbles with the foot that treads upon it. "They that dwell therein shall die in like manner." You stand a ruin amid ruin. "Where are your fathers?" your friends? your brethren? Plainly, if you have not something better than time, you have nothing.

II. Contrast with all this the undecaying character of the blessings of salvation. "My salvation shall be for ever." The Gospel comes not under this law of mutability. It partakes of the unchangeableness and immortality of its Author, and addresses itself to the changeless and incorruptible part of man.

1. *It exhibits a permanent standard of truth*—truth of doctrine, truth of morals. Truth is everlasting. Therefore, if we have evidence of the truth of the Gospel, we have evidence of its everlasting character. Errors are nothing. They are deceptions, and must pass away. They are the clouds of the mind, and however gilded and painted they may be by chance rays of truth, they change while we gaze upon them, and shall be swept away by the wind of heaven. But truth is the steady light of heaven. This truth survived the test of experiment. It has been found suited to men of all sorts and in all conditions. It is bound up essentially with the moral condition of man; and, therefore, it can never become obsolete. While man is man, he must know that he is a sinner—that he needs a Saviour—that he cannot secure his own happiness, but must find it in communion with higher beings in higher worlds. What the Gospel has been, it is. Had it failed to reveal pardon, to secure peace, to reconcile to God, to point the way to heaven, it would have been a vanity, and it would have died out like other vanities long ago. But it answers these ends. It is the only system that does so. It abides the test of experiment. It is felt and acknowledged to

be Divine (H. E. I. 1138, 1139, 1142–1148, 2421–2427).

2. *It presents a perpetual source of comfort.* Comfort under the changes and the frowns of the world—under the sense of guilt—under the temptations of Satan—under the loss of friends—under the fear of death.

3. *It reveals and communicates an undecaying principle of life.* By it life and immortality are brought to light. It *conveys* life; it is regenerative; it gives the life of grace, as well as reveals and leads to the life of glory.

Consequently, 1. *The Gospel demands your most serious attention.* This is demanded by the subject of its message; and by the majesty of its Author, who here says, "Hearken to me!" 2. *It solicits your cordial acceptance.* "The isles shall wait for Me, and on Mine arm shall they trust." 3. *It leaves no alternative between obedience and ruin* (ver 8).—*Samuel Thodey.*

(a) "Mark the glory of collective man. United he puts on the appearance of strength. He founds empires, builds cities; he guards by his armies, he cements all by his policy. But trace the track of civilised man through the world, and you find it covered with the wreck of his hopes; and the monuments of his power have been converted into the mockery of his weakness. His eternal cities moulder in their ruins. The serpent hisses in the cabinet where he planned his empire. Echo itself is startled by the foot which breaks the silence which has reigned for ages in his hall of feast and song. Columns stand in the untrodden desert; and the hut of the shepherd or the den of the robber shelters the only residents of his palaces. And the glory which now exists is crumbling everywhere, where it has not the cement of Christianity, and where it takes not something of perpetuity from the everlasting Word. All heathen glory and Mahommedan pride creak in the blast and nod to their fall. The withering wind or the raging tempest shall pass over them in turn; and men shall sit upon the ruins of their proudest grandeur, and be reminded that *all flesh is grass.*"—*Watson.*

God's unchangeable purposes cannot fail. Such is the thought with which Isaiah animates the people of God, discouraged by the taunts of those who thought that the promises of Jehovah would not be fulfilled. All changes but the Eternal God.

I. The majestic heavens over our heads are subject to the law of change. True, these great changes baffle our powers. The life of man is too short to mark great changes in that which seems the least subject to this law, the heavens above us. Yet science teaches us that vast changes are going on in the very life of our system, the sun. And one day the heavens will pass away with a great noise and be rolled up as a scroll.

II. The earth is subject to the law of change. The scientific facts by which this is proved are most abundant—

"There rolls the deep where grew the tree;
O earth! what changes hast thou seen!
There, where the long street rolls, hath been
The stillness of the central sea."

III. Man, made in the image of God, is not exempt from the operation of this law. The highest and noblest work of God, the most perfect of nature's works, passes away, dissolved into a few gases and a small amount of earthy substances. "One generation passeth away and another cometh." But amid this universal change one thing abides; it is the purpose of the everlasting God.

IV. The salvation and the righteousness of God abide unchanged. The kingdom of God waxes not old. It is subject to no decay. 1. The salvation that God has provided for man is available throughout all generations. 2. The righteousness which led to its provision is the guarantee of its continuance. When the character of God changes and is subject to decay, then His salvation shall *not* be for ever. The salvation and the righteousness of God are *manifested* in Christ. The Epiphany will be everlasting because He is an everlasting Saviour—eternally "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. p. 71.

I. The destiny of the heavens and the earth. II. The destiny of man. III. The destiny of God's saving rule. —*E. Johnson, B.A.*

A Call to Moral Heroism.

li. 7, 8. *Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, &c.*

A beautiful description of God's people. They know righteousness. His law is in their hand.

I. The people of God must expect to be assailed by reproaches and revilings. There is a perpetual antagonism between the Church and the world. Their spirit and aims are diametrically opposed. Light is not more opposed to darkness, truth to falsehood, love to hatred, the bitterness of gall to the sweetness of the honeycomb, than the spirit of the world is to the spirit engendered by real religion. Hence the violent hatred and opposition that have been maintained towards the righteous from age to age. You see it in *individual cases.* Cain hated Abel, and slew him. Haman hated Mordecai, and sought his destruction, &c. Thus it has been with *communities.* The heathen nations —Egypt, Philistia, Assyria, Babylon— persecuted the Jewish Church, and hated it in proportion as it was holy. The degenerate Jews abhorred the Christian Church. Not content with putting its Founder to death, they sought to destroy His servants. Live Christians are still objects of aversion to the world. For several reasons they are exposed to reproach and revilings:—

1. *Because of the doctrines they believe.* These embrace all that is peculiar and fundamental in the Gospel. Infidels mock at those who hold them as the victims of a miserable deception.

2. *Because of the profession they make as Christ's followers.* Their obedience to His command to confess them before men is reviled as pride and vain glory; their exclusive adherence to the truths He has taught them, as bigotry; their earnestness in propagating them, as fanaticism.

3. *The influence they exert.* It renders the men of the world uncomfortable; and so they rail at the Christian's separation from the world as austerity; his attachment to Christian ordinances as superstition.

II. Of the reproaches and revilings by which God's people are assailed they are not to be afraid. By our text they are summoned to the exercise of moral courage. They are to show that courage is an essential element of Christian character (H. E. I. 1042–1045). 1. "Fear ye not," *for yours is a just cause.* 2. "Fear ye not," *for God will strengthen you.* Whatever the nature or amount of opposition you are called to endure, God will uphold you (H. E. I. 3667, 3668). 3. "Fear ye not," *for in meeting undeserved reproach you will have an inward approbation of conscience.* 4. "Fear ye not," *for the endurance of such reproach will assimilate you to the tried and good.* Think of the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs. Think, above all, of your Saviour. 5. "Fear ye not," *for such endurance will be rewarded in the final day.* Then it will be seen that the power of the revilers, like the revilers themselves, was evanescent, while the salvation, of which those who have the courage to endure reproach are made partakers, shall endure for ever.—*George Smith, D.D.*

A Prayer for the Forth-putting of Divine Power.

li. 9. *Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.*

The simplest exercise in which man can engage is also the sublimist. It is the exercise of prayer. Human helplessness may cast itself on Divine Omnipotence. Nothing is too insignificant to interest the Heavenly Father (H. E. I. 3756). There is ample instruction in His Word as to things respecting

which petitions may be addressed to Him. Whatever He has there promised to His Church, may be included in her prayers. This idea animates the text. The prophecy proclaims the deliverance of the captive people, and then the triumphs of the Gospel in the latter days. Under the influence of these cheering announcements, God's people are represented as breaking forth in the earnest entreaty of the text. It is the Church's continual cry. *We ask that the power of God's Spirit may be exerted for the accomplishment of the great things He has taught us to expect.* And such prayer is justified by several considerations.

I. BY THE FACT THAT THE EXERCISE OF THE POWER OF GOD'S SPIRIT IS NECESSARY.

As the deliverance from Babylon could only be effected by Divine power, so can only the spiritual deliverance of the world from the dominion of sin. It requires the removal of impediments, the opening of fields of labour, and the provision of suitable instruments for the work. In the case of the individual, it requires a change of heart, because of the depravity that characterises all mankind. When you remember the resisting power of the human will, and that its natural inclinations are adverse to the Divine supremacy, you will not deem the metaphors of Scripture, such as the new birth and the quickening of the dead, too strong to represent the change that must occur within the heart. It is a change to which nothing less than Divine power is equal (H. E. I. 4106–4113).

II. BY THE FACT THAT THAT POWER HAS BEEN EXERCISED.

"As in the ancient days, in the generations of old" (vers. 9, 10). The wonders of Egypt and the Red Sea, which the Jews never wearied of reciting, could be pleaded when seeking new interpositions of the Divine hand. *We* can plead the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, when asking for an enlarged manifestation of the Spirit's work; because that which occurred then was not a transaction complete in itself, but rather the beginning of a work. The resources of the Gospel under the ministry of Paul and others can be pleaded, when it came to the people "in power and the Holy Ghost." There are instances in the history of modern missions equally significant. Times of revival of religion may be pleaded similarly. Perhaps our own experience as Christian labourers supplies us with ground of encouragement to intercede for a repetition and continuance of the usefulness with which we have been favoured.

III. BY THE FACT THAT IT IS PROMISED.

1. *Let us establish the fact.* The prophecy connected with the text, which emboldened its petition, involves the exertion of whatever power is necessary to its fulfilment. In this light all prophecies may be read. Therefore the prophecies which foretell the glory of the Church, when the Gentiles and the Jews shall be converted, imply such exertion of Divine power, as well as the full provision of all other means and influences tributory to the results predicted. How long shall the spectacle of moral desolation presented by the present state of the world continue? The answer is given in chap. xxxii. 15. Who is to accomplish that great work within the soul which is represented by an operation within the body which no surgery can ever perform? Answer: Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Jesus promised to baptize His Church with the Holy Ghost and fire. The dispensation of the Gospel is the ministration of the Spirit. The Spirit of God is in the Church and with the Church, and under the requisite conditions may be so to a much larger extent than has hitherto been experienced. The first fruits have been gathered. They are the promise of the harvest.

2. *Let us see how the fact bears on the offering of prayer for the Spirit.* If every promise is a warrant and directory of prayer, then, even were there nothing directly on the subject in the Bible, this would fall under that principle; it would become the duty of the

Church to pray for it. But there is a constant reiteration of the truth that the power of God's Spirit must be sought in prayer (ch. lxii. 6, 7, &c.) After the great promise of the Spirit in Ezekiel, you have this statement: "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The parable of the friend at midnight. The argument from the readiness of parents to give good things to their children. During the ten days of waiting for the power of the Holy Ghost, the disciples met daily for prayer. And then the Spirit came. Is not the history of the Church filled with illustrations of the truth that religion has flourished and extended largely as the Church has valued and sought the power of the Spirit?

Pray for the Spirit, therefore, to come on yourselves, on the Church, on the world. What will be the effect? More good accomplished. Personal influence deepened. Your own soul quickened.—*J. Rawlinson.*

This language is both natural and figurative. What more natural than that the Church, in times of trial, suffering, and yet expectation, should look upwards, and seek deliverance from Him who is "mighty to save?" The way in which the petition is urged is in no sense artificial, the "arm" of the Lord is invoked as the symbol of a powerful interposition.

I. A FACT: The Lord has a mighty arm. The Scriptures lend no countenance to the childish notion that the Creator is indifferent to His own handiwork, that He withdraws from all interference with the creation, with His intelligent subjects. Often mentioning the "right arm" of Jehovah, they presume that He is not only almighty, but accustomed to assert His authority and exercise His power.

II. A MEMORY: The Lord has been wont to interpose on behalf of His people. It was characteristic of the religion of the Hebrews that it was indissolubly connected with their national history. Their songs of praise recorded the signal interventions of Omnipotence on behalf of their forefathers; their prayers pleaded memorable instances of compassionate and effective interferences for their safety. They based their pious hopes, not only upon their convictions as to God's attributes, but upon their recollections, and their national records of God's doings. "We have heard with our ears . . . what great things Thou didst," &c. It is well thus to recall the proofs of God's power and pity which have in the past abounded towards mankind, and especially to base all our hopes and petitions upon His memorable redemption of mankind effected by Jesus Christ.

III. A PRAYER: Awake, awake! This does not suppose that God is indifferent to His people's need and sore distress. But it presumes that the exercise of Divine mercy, and helpfulness, and protection, is, by His wisdom, made contingent upon our readiness to receive what the Lord is ever ready to bestow. He will be inquired of by His people. He is not like Baal, of whom the prophet Elijah tauntingly said, "Peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." The sleepless eye of God is ever upon His people's circumstances; the sleepless heart of God is ever conscious and sensitive with regard to His people's needs. But He will answer those who honour Him. Call upon Him in the day of trouble and He will deliver. It is not faithlessness, but faith, that cries, "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord, put on strength!"—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. p. 69.

I. The arm of God is almighty. II. Prayer can move it. III. It is our privilege in every emergency to cry, "Awake," &c. IV. There have been given to us great encouragements to believe that this appeal will not be made in vain: God's care of His Church in past times; His unchangeableness; the promises recorded.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*. *Homiletical Treasury*, Part I. p. 70.

The Cry of the Church, and its Lord's Response.

li. 9. *Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.*

lii. 1. *Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city.*

I. The call of the Church to Almighty God for help (li. 9).

This call implies, 1. *That the Church felt itself to be in a very unsatisfactory state.* The Church was in captivity, was subdued by a powerful and victorious foe. The enemy from which the Church is in danger now, triumphs not by force, but by subtlety. It is lamentable to see in how many instances the Church, instead of conquering the world, is conquered by it, and is held firmly in its soft but unrelaxing grasp. The Church seems now to be throwing open its gates to admit the enemy, mistaking him for a friend. The spirit of the world seems to be establishing itself in the Church. Oh! what slumber, what torpor, what a diminished power of prayer, what a practical underrating of the value of prayer, &c.

2. *That whenever it became conscious of its unsatisfactory condition, there rises from it a call to the Lord of the Church for His gracious help for the renewal and quickening of life which comes from Him alone.*

II. The responsive call of the Church's Lord (lii. 1). Whilst the Church is slumbering and inconsistent there is no beauty of character, no generous, earnest activity; but the effect of God's answering prayer and putting forth His power is to stimulate the activity of the Church. There is a vast amount of latent power not put forth when the Church is slumbering. When God responds to the call of the Church, He calls that latent force into vigorous action, and then the Church arises and puts on again her fair garment, pure and white, which is the righteousness of the saints.

1. "*Awake! awake!*" When the Church is slumbering and inconsistent, instead of acting, it is acted upon by the world. The Church must be as wakeful as the world.

2. "*Put on thy strength.*" As if when slumbering the Church had thrown aside its armour and lost even the sinews of its strength. Certain elements of character constitute the Church's strength; these she is to put on and exhibit in all their force. A man has strength, spiritual and moral, when he has fairly mastered a subject; when he has faith; when he has determination, fixed resolve; when he has sympathy; when he has courage. And now, says the Church's Lord to her, "Put on your strength; put on these characteristic elements of yours as a Church; put them forth in all their force; and then your enemies will be subdued, and vice, wickedness, immorality, blindness, inconsistency, and worldliness will fall.

3. "*Put on thy beautiful garments,*" *&c.* There is an assemblage of excellences which the Church is to exhibit to the gaze of the world, and which, when seen, even the world itself cannot fail to admire. This the apostle puts in another form which is very expressive, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." The life of Christ will be reproduced in the history of His followers, and the beauties of character for which He was distinguished, will shine out in their lives. Our Lord summons us to all this; to awake and put on strength and exhibit lofty consistency, not for our own sakes alone. When there is power combined with beauty of character, then we shall not have to complain of defeat, but shall rejoice in victory, and in our Lord's glory we shall see our own.—*J. C. Harrison: Penny Pulpit*, new series, No. 526.

THE GLAD HOME-GOING.

li. 11. *Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, &c.* (α)

The words of the text, fulfilled in the history of the return from captivity, are in our case awaiting the richer, fuller interpretation of death.

I. THOSE WHO ARE DESTINED TO THIS GLORIOUS HOME-GOING. "The redeemed of the Lord."

The expression is one which grows out of the Levitical law, and means one set free by the payment of a price. The precise signification of the word is that of *substitution*. A man redeemed his first-born by substituting an animal for him. The first-born were also freed by the substitution of a special offering of equal value, made for all classes. The sons of Levi rendered substituted service for all the tribes. These were types and shadows of another Substitute, who, bearing the sins of many, guiltless but treated as guilty, should deliver from the curse and power of sin.

The deliverance of humanity from wilfulness and its woes was costly to Almighty love. This law of substitution, and painful substitution, runs through all human history. You find it everywhere (H. E. I. 393–395.) We must live for others and die for others. God has placed Himself under the same law. "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." By crucifixion of His own love; by self-sacrifice; by pain, and pang, and death, He breaks the bonds of moral slavery, condemns sin in the flesh, works a hatred of it which insures its extermination. What law could not do, God, sending His own Son in the flesh, did. The ransom was Himself. The redeemed compose "the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood." Men who by faith have appropriated and rest upon this great wonder of suffering love, are placed in a new condition by means of it. The Redeemer is a ransom *for all*, to be testified in due time. The old Church was redeemed through Him. Nations unborn are included in the gracious purpose. The children, called to His embrace, share the benefit of His loving substitution, are numbered among the redeemed. Our loved ones who have tasted death, swell the gathering crowd of immortals redeemed. Bought with a price, faithful unto death, they escaped its sting and destructive energy, and are now triumphant, rejoicing spirits,—"the redeemed of the Lord."

II. THEIR DESTINATION. "They shall return and come to Zion."

After the woes and privations of the Captivity, a prosperous Church state was to be restored. Zion was the place of Divine, manifested grace. God recorded His name there. The Shekinah cloud rested there. There He met the people, and conferred the boons of His salvation.

The earthly Zion was a type of the heavenly. Two ideas are here suggested—nearness to God and holy association.

1. *The redeemed on high are brought into nearer fellowship with God.* There are easily conceivable visible manifestations of glory far beyond what are now possible. Emancipated from dependence upon sense, there will be a vast increase of spiritual capacity, and a corresponding enlargement of the means and opportunities of knowledge. Their acquaintance with the purposes and character of God, their feeling of His love, and grace, and tenderness, will be immeasurably greater and more intense than any known on earth. There is an infinite variety of Divine manifestations throughout the universe. There can be no dull uniformity in that higher life. No veil hides the eternal brightness. The beatific vision is face to face. The communications of the Divine mind are constant and familiar; the tokens of Divine grace are never withdrawn; the pledges of Divine fidelity are received and enjoyed without restriction. God is manifested in His highest glory, and humanity reaches its highest ex

altation. Now in part—then, as also we are known.

2. *The coming to Zion is expressive of personal association and fellowship.* The return from the Captivity was that of a multitude. The words recall the joyous going up and assembling of the tribes to observe the solemn rites of their religion, and to enjoy social intercourse with each other. The heavenly state knows no loneliness. Every spirit forms one of a blissful company. Heaven is a *social* state. Lost loves are found, and broken relations are united, and interrupted fellowships are resumed. The mutual recognition of the faithful departed is one of the beliefs which nature suggests, and revelation implies and authenticates (P. D. 2926–2928). It does not so much rest upon single texts, as it is the keynote of the melody, and the uniting principle of the harmony of many. Every description implies it—every pictured scene discloses it. Love abides through death. Memory abides through death. We shall find what we have lost, and know we have found it. As the years pass how rich heaven becomes! Those who are there forbid the thought of it as a strange place (H. E. I. 470, 2739). It is our home—our Father's house.

III. THEIR NEW CONDITIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES. "Everlasting joy,"&c.

During the Captivity there were sore longings for freedom and home. The captives wept when they remembered Zion. They could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land. Here all that is reversed. Inappeasable desire is gone. Heaven will contain much we have never imagined (H. E. I. 2714–2727).

There is, then, no loss in death. We are saved by hope. The future of the redeemed is assured by the Redeemer. Life is theirs. Death is theirs. Heaven is theirs. They shall go no more out for ever!—*W. Hope Davison: The Preacher's Monthly*, vol. vii. pp. 25–27.

(a) See Outlines on ch. xxxv. 8–10, in vol. I. pp. 409–413.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING HOME TO HEAVEN. "The redeemed of the Lord."

1. *They were once captives.* Of Satan (2 Tim. ii. 16). Slaves to their own depraved affections and desires—"sold under sin" (Rom. vii. 23). Prisoners to the Divine law—owing a debt which they could not discharge, and exposed to the righteous penalty.

2. *They could not redeem themselves.* The price was too great for such insolvents to pay, &c. (see on ch. lii. 3).

3. *It was the work of an Almighty Saviour to ransom the captives.* He alone could pay the price, and deliver them from the grasp of Satan and the thraldom of sin, &c. He is emphatically called the "Redeemer," and His people "the redeemed" (Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14; 1 Cor. vi. 19).

4. *They are redeemed to be the Lord's people.* They are no longer slaves, but the Lord's freemen—His property, servants, children, &c.; redeemed that they may share in the privileges and joys of the sons of God (Rom. xiv. 9).

II. THE NATURE OF THEIR JOURNEY.

1. *They are journeying heavenward.* "Shall return and come to Zion." Zion was the type of the heavenly city—one of its names (Heb. xii. 22; Rev. xiv. 1; Ps. lxv. 1, lxxxiv. 7). Heaven the place of perfect worship, fellowship, &c. The object of the Christian pilgrims' highest hope, around which their best affections centre, &c. Can never be fully at rest till they reach their Father's home on high, and repose on His paternal bosom.

2. *They are journeying heavenward in dependence upon God.* They feel themselves weak, &c., but they rely upon the promised strength, &c. In Christ they have perfect strength, for perfect weakness. The homeward journey may be trying; they may have to tread on thorns, to shiver in the keen winds, &c.; but notwithstanding all, they advance under the benediction of heaven. God in all the Omnipotence of His might is with them, and therefore, "through winds and stormy seas," "they shall return to Zion."

3. *They journey joyfully.* "They come to Zion with singing. As the ransomed captives would return from Babylon, and as travellers commonly do now in the East; as a bird got loose out of a cage. They gratefully sing the praises of their great Deliverer and Conductor; they confidently sing of His loving care, &c; of their glorious prospects, and of their ultimate triumph, "and find it nearer while they sing."

III. THE BLISSFUL TERMINATION OF THE JOURNEY.

1. *They shall finish their course with triumphant joy.* "Everlasting joy," &c. They reach home with *difficulty* (1 Pet. iv. 18), but *certainly*. Enemies conquered — beatific vision — exalted society, &c. What a blissful termination! What are other journeys compared with this? What sources of joy and gladness are here!

2. *They shall receive an incorruptible crown.* "Songs and everlasting joy *upon their heads.*" This may refer to the custom of wearing a wreath or chaplet of flowers in times of festivity, as is often done now, and as was commonly done among the ancients in triumphal processions.

3. *They shall be eternally exempt from all that creates pain and uneasiness.* "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." It *must* be so in the heavenly home (Rev. xxi. 4). No sigh was ever heaved there, no head ever ached there, &c. "In this world of changes it is a short step from joy to sorrow, but in that world sorrow and mourning shall flee away, never to return or come in view again." Eternal health, wealth, purity, security, happiness, light, &c. "Eternal life!" Life in its highest forms and manifestations. Life with Christ—eternal and ineffable, ever developing in all perfection of strength, and beauty, and joy!

CONCLUSION:

1. *The value of Christianity.* No other religion can furnish such consolation amid human woes; and no other religion is, therefore, adapted to humanity. We are under infinite obligations to Christ, for from Him we derive all our present and future bliss. Let the prospect of such a home hearten us under the trials and difficulties of life. Press nobly on with assured confidence and eager desire.

2. *The heavenly home belongs to "the redeemed of the Lord."* But there are some of you who are the bond-slaves of Satan, &c. "Repent and believe the Gospel" of freedom. Come to Christ, trust Him for emancipation from the thraldom of sin and Satan, and then let your ransomed life be one of praise and devotion to your great Deliverer.—*Alfred Tucker.*

FEAR OF GOD AND MAN.

li. 12, 13. *I, even I, am He that comforteth you, &c.*

I. THE TWO PARTIES SET OVER AGAINST EACH OTHER, "Man that shall die," &c.; and "the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens," &c. It is a main object of the Scriptures to set in the most vivid contrast the meanness, emptiness, nothingness of man; and the all-sufficiency, the majesty, and the glory of God (vers. 7, 8; Job iv. 13–19, xiv. 1, 2; Ps. xxxix. 5; Isa. xl. 6, 7; James iv. 14). In striking contrast with man's nothingness, the Scriptures set forth the majesty of God's glory (Gen. i. 1–3; Ps. cxiii. 5, 6; 1 Chron. xxix. 11; Job xxxviii. 4–11, 16, 17, 34, 35, Ps. xviii. 6–15). Not even the language of inspiration could measure the boundless interval which lies between finite and infinite, the creature and the Creator, sinful mortals and a holy God.

II. MAN, RATHER THAN GOD, IS PRACTICALLY THE OBJECT OF REVERENCE, RESPECT, AND FEAR. The whole system of society seems founded on the principle that human sanctions are above Divine. To keep society in order, it is necessary, even where the Lord hath spoken with the most awful

sanctions He can employ, that the law of the land should interpose with its more effectual and prevailing influence.

Look at some instances in which these two authorities do not act conjointly. Debts to man are paid; what we owe to God gives us little uneasiness, perhaps none. In courts of justice there is watchful vigilance to observe the rules laid down, in every minute punctilio; it is forgotten that the King of kings is present wherever we turn our eyes. The presence of God, though admitted in a way, produces not half the controlling influence that the presence even of the most insignificant of their fellow-mortals would do. "It is a shame," says the apostle, "even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret;" and yet these secrets are all known to God. The eye of God no more interrupts sinful pleasure than does the notice of infancy or the stupid stare of one of the inferior animals. But, speaking generally, the fear of man, or in other words, the law of public opinion, is the great regulator of life. Other passions are submissive to the master-passion—the fear of man. The profane swearer masters his tongue in refined society. The Sabbath is kept out of regard to man. Debts of common honesty are lightly regarded; debts of *honour* are binding. The case is too clear to need more proofs. Of by far the greater portion of society it may be affirmed, that "all their works they do to be seen of men." To an extent, of which they are not themselves aware, the law of opinion, and not the law of God, is their rule of life. The Bible comes to them filtered through man's opinion, only the filtering is not a purifying process.

III. THE EMPHATIC QUESTION, "WHO ART THOU?"

The inquiry seems to have been first addressed to those whose prevailing fear of man was the result, rather of weakness under trying circumstances, than of carnal blindness and depravity of heart; it seems intended for the encouragement of God's people when threatened with dangers, and particularly when harassed by the terrors which cruel enemies inspire; "I, even I, am He that comforteth you;" then come the words before us, followed by the pathetic expressions, "And hast feared continually," &c. "And where is the fury of the oppressor?" As much as to say, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" To such the text brings reassurance and encouragement.

But with far different emphasis does it apply to those who, in the genuine spirit of the world, pay that homage to man which they refuse to God. The *tone* is that of indignation and surprise, "Who art thou?" What reasonable intelligence can fear him who can only kill the body, rather than the dread Being who holds the keys of death and hell? It can only be accounted for in one way, viz., that the senses, which can alone take cognizance of God, are closed. But such judicial blindness is no cloak for this sin, since man brings it on himself (Rom. ii. 17–21). To us, favoured above God's ancient people, with what redoubled force does this voice of expostulation speak! Well may God apply to us such affecting words as are contained in Scripture (ch. v. 4).

CONCLUSION: "Who art thou," that "worships and serves the creature more than the Creator"? Can man "arise and save thee in the time of thy trouble"? Can the world "pluck from memory a rooted sorrow"? Can it lighten the darkness of a dying hour? O then, "cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils!"—*H. Woodward, M.A.: Church of England Magazine*, vol. xxii. pp. 56–61.

The fear spoken of is misplaced fear; hence fear that weakens and leads astray, and makes unfaithful to God, as well as makes the child of God miserable.

I. SOME OF THE CAUSES OF GROUNDLESS AND DISPROPORTIONATE FEAR.

1. *Our over-estimating of temporal interests.* Even supposing men do their worst, and the furnace of worldly

trouble be heated to its utmost, "who art thou," whose interests are so high, and wide-spreading, and enduring, that thou shouldest be greatly cast down? Will the wealthy man lose his sleep, and become miserable, because he has lost sixpence in the street? Not if his mind is sound. If he does, he is diseased; and our souls are diseased if our whole horizon is darkened by mere worldly loss and trouble.

2. *Our turning of our eyes wholly to the seen, and shutting them to the unseen.* God is invisible; "man" and worldly difficulties are visible, prominent to the eyes of sense. We must walk by faith and not by sight, if we are to walk calmly and nobly. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. If we allow the visible and sensible to tyrannise over us, they will scourge us more cruelly than Egyptian taskmasters did their slaves. "Lord, increase our faith," and we shall be able to sing, "God is a present help in trouble."

3. *Unbelief in God's fatherly interest in us.* "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man," &c. Thou dost not realise or remember who thou art. A child of God, redeemed by Christ, the very hairs of thy head numbered.

II. SOME THOUGHTS WHICH INSPIRE AND KEEP UP COURAGE.

1. *Man and all created powers are weak; God is omnipotent.* "God stretched forth the foundations," &c. Man is feeble as the grass. Greater is He that is for you than all that can be against you.

2. *Man and all created powers are short-lived; God is eternal.* Opposed to thee is "a man that shall die;" on thy side are the everlasting arms. Make the eternal God thy refuge, and thou wilt not fear them that can kill the body, and have nothing more that they can do.

3. *The Lord is "thy Maker."* There is endless hope in that thought. He that has made knows our frame, and will have mercy on the works of His hands.

4. *He has intimate individual knowledge of thee and sympathy with thee.* The prophet passes from the plural of the context into the singular in the text. "Thou," "Thy." Our relations with God are individual. He holds each of us by the hand.

5. *He values thee far above the material earth and heaven.* He that made and maintains them will not forget His child, that can look in His face, and know, and trust, and love Him. Whether would the mother make surest of saving her jewels or her child in a shipwreck? He has proved His incomparable love to thee in Christ.—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. p. 71.

THE MORTALITY AND FRAILTY OF MAN.

li. 12. *Man that shall die, and the son of man which shall be made as grass.*

David, when musing upon the sublime scenery which the heavens presented, proposed a question of vast importance: "What is man?" Man is a *wonderful* being. "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." What the psalmist uttered, modern science has more fully established. "It is impossible to contemplate this admirable and beautiful temple of the deathless spirit without awakened wonder. It is one of the finest pieces of mechanism which can possibly be contemplated." He is an *intelligent* being. As such he is nature's king—the world's monarch. What majestic powers he possesses! (P. D. 2376, 2380, 2381, 2400.) He is a *spiritual* being. "That *must* be a *spiritual* being which is conscious that it exists, and yet cannot be *divided into parts*. Having a spiritual nature, man is capable of constant thought, perpetual improvement in knowledge, of enjoying union with the Deity, a continual increase of happiness, and everlasting life. These give him a superiority over the brute creation, and render him morally responsible

for all his ways." He is a *guilty* and *depraved* being (Rom. i. 29–31, iii. 12–18). He is also a *mortal* and a *frail* being, and these are the facts presented for our consideration in the text.

I. Man is mortal. "Man that must die." *All* men—even the most mighty—must soon become the lifeless tenants of the tomb. (α) For death has entered our world by sin, and all who have ever lived, save Enoch and Elias, have died, or shall die. It matters not, however beautiful or talented, &c., you must die (H. E. I. 1536, 1537; P. D. 677, 751, 752). God hath decreed it—hath declared it (Ps. xc. 3; Isa. li. 6; Heb. ix. 27).

II. Man is frail; he is "as grass." (β) We are "*as* grass"—1. *In the frailty of our nature.* "How fragile is the grass! a breath, an atom, a touch, will kill it. So with man. We are not like the cedars of Lebanon, or the oaks of Bashan." Like the springing grass, we shall soon pass away. What is human life? A mere temporary state of existence (Job vii. 1; Ps. xc. 10, and cxliv. 4; 1 Pet. i. 17). A short and uncertain duration of being (Job xiv. 1, and xvi. 22; James iv. 14). What is your life?

'A flower that does with opening dawn arise,
And flourishing the day, at evening dies;
A winged eastern blast, just skimming o'er
The ocean's brow, and sinking on the shore;
A fire, whose flames through crackling stubble fly;
A meteor, shooting from the summer sky;
A bowl, adown the bending mountain rolled;
A bubble breaking—and a fable told;
A noontide shadow, and a midnight dream;
Are emblems which, semblance apt, proclaim
Our earthly course."—*Prior.*

2. *In the uncertainty of our lives.* In all seasons the blade dies. Every moment some grass withers. Every second some man dies—either the infant, the youth, or the aged. But we know not the day or the hour.

3. *In the unnoticeableness of our dissolution.* Unnumbered blades of grass wither and die every day, yet the landscape is as beautiful as ever, for others spring up and take their place. So with man. Multitudes are dying every day, but all goes on as usual. (γ)

CONCLUSION.—What effect ought these truths to produce? They should lead, 1. *To the diligent improvement of human life.* The great business of life is to know and serve God (1 Chron. xxviii. 9; 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; 1 Tim. iv. 8; Phil. iii. 8; Eccles. xii. 13). Can anything be more important, more rational, more excellent? To seek and secure the salvation of your soul. What a work to be accomplished! and all during this short, this uncertain life! Be diligent. 2. *To constant readiness for death* (H. E. I. 1562–1566; P. D. 730, 734).—*Alfred Tucker.*

(α) When the vault containing the remains of the royal Charlemagne was opened by the Emperor Otho, the body was found, not reclining, but seated on a throne, with a crown on his fleshless brow, kingly robes covering his skeleton, a sceptre in his bony hand, a copy of the Gospels on his knee, and a pilgrim's pouch fastened to his girdle. What a humiliating picture of human dignity! What an ineffectual attempt to retain the appearance of life, even amidst the horrors of death! That ghastly skeleton, as it fronts you with a mournful grin, teaches the lesson that even kings must die; crowns and sceptres cannot ward off the blow of the destroyer; he enters alike peasant cot and palace hall.

(β) P. D. 2383, 2384. The comparison of a human being with grass is very beautiful, and quite common in the Scriptures. The comparison turns on the fact, that the grass, however green or beautiful it may be, soon loses its freshness; is withered; is cut down, and dies (Ps. ciii. 15, 16; Isa. xl. 6–8, a passage which is evidently referred to by Peter in his first epistle, ch. i. 20, 24; James i. 10, 11). This sentiment is beautifully imitated by the great dramatist in the speech of Wolsey:—

"This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope, to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
And—when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening—nips his root,
And then he falls."

(γ) If the death of ordinary individuals be but as the casting of a pebble from the seashore into the ocean, which is neither missed from the one nor sensibly gained by the other, the death of the more extraordinary ones is but as the foundering of a piece of rock into the abyss beneath: it makes at the time a great splash, but the wave it raises soon subsides into a ripple, and the ripple itself soon sinks to a placid level.—*J. A. James.*

The Captive Seeking Deliverance.

li. 14, 15. *The captive exile hasteneth, &c.* (α)

I. A description of the wretched condition of the sinner—an exile. 1. *His captivity.* (1.) Judicial; (2.) practical; (3.) circumstantial. 2. *His impending destruction.*

II. The eager desire of the exile for deliverance. (1.) He uses every probable means for it. (2.) There appears to him a good prospect of deliverance.

III. The provision made for the captive exile. (1.) The Gospel is a revelation of mercy. (2.) A dispensation of power. (3.) The effectual means of a sinner's deliverance from sin.—*T. Lessey.*

The captive. I. *His condition*—captive—in the pit. II. *His fears*—destitution—destruction. III. *His encouragement*—deliverance is at hand. IV. *His assurance*—the Word—the power of God.—*J. Lyth, D.D.: Homiletical Treasury, Isaiah*, p. 70.

(α) Before developing either of the outlines here reproduced, attention should be given to Delitzsch's translation of these verses.

Commissioned, Endowed, and Preserved.

(*Wicklyffe Quincentenary.*) (α)

li. 16. *And I have put My words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee, &c.*

Great words these, to be spoken by God to men! We need have no hesitation in appropriating for ourselves the comfort and encouragement they convey, for, though addressed to Israel and referring to the work to be accomplished by their Messiah, we have each a Divine mission to fulfil as servants and followers of Christ, and ours are the promises by which He was sustained.

God here declares what is His great design—"to plant," &c. The language is clearly figurative, and denotes the new creation. At ver. 13 reference is made to the first creation, and this is used in the text as an image of the second—spiritual creation. There are many points of similarity between the two. Both alike are works of Divine power, wrought by the word of God's mouth (Gen. i. 3; Jas. i. 18). In both there is the operation of the Holy Spirit (Gen. i. 2; John iii. 5). In the new creation the peace, holiness, and love, which were lost by the Fall, are restored, and the object of all God's dealings with our sinful race through long centuries is to create them anew, and restore them to His favour and image. Like the first creation, the new is a gradual process, advancing from age to age.

1. *In this work God employs His servants.* When it is said "that I may plant," &c., it is obvious that it is through Israel the work is to be done (1 Cor. iii. 9). What an honour that He should call us to His service, and use us as instruments in realising His great designs. Here is a thought to make us brave and diligent. Let us make *our work God's* and *God's work ours*, devoting our energies to the furtherance of His kingdom. Every other aim that engages our time and talents is trifling compared with this. If a man feels that his uppermost wish is to promote the Redeemer's reign, he is ennobled, sanctifying all his endeavours by throwing into them a lofty purpose, and making all his activities converge upon the advancement of the truth. No man will ever do anything great and enduring who does not thus ally himself with God. Let a man say,—"This work, at which I am toiling, is not after all my work but God's," and in that lies the secret of strenuous labour and patience amid

discouragement. Oh the honour, the dignity, the peace of being consciously a worker together with God! That is to dwell in a region high above the fretting cares and sordid aims of the ordinary world. While others are wailing their hopeless dirges, you are singing your hymns of faith and hope.

2. *For this work God arms His servants.* "I have put My words in thy mouth." This is the weapon which we are to wield (1 Thess. ii. 13). He is fully furnished into whose mouth God puts His word, who wields the sword of the Spirit. How feeble is man's word, the word of even the mightiest of men. It falls as powerless as King Canute's order to the flowing tide, bidding it retire from his royal feet as he sat upon the shore. But behind God's word there is the omnipotence of Him whose word it is. Let us have faith in God's words, in their power to subdue human hearts. It is because we often utter them as if they were our own words that they are robbed of their power. It is because we listen to them as man's words that we despise them. This is all we need for the spiritual conquest of the world—to have God's words put in our mouth. With this weapon wisely used we shall overcome the giants of ignorance, superstition, and unbelief. The men of Reformation-times were courageous, because they had a firm faith in God's word, and what the Church needs to-day is a revival of that unquestioning faith in God's message as a power to plant the spiritual heavens and lay anew the foundations of the earth, to carry peace to the troubled and comfort to the disconsolate, to disarm hostility, break down prejudices and bear down opposition, and guide the seeking soul to the Cross.

3. *For this work and in it God preserves His servants.* "I have covered thee in the shadow of Mine hand." He who undertakes God's work may expect to encounter opposition from the world, which is opposed to God's loving purpose. Israel had a Divine mission to fulfil, and the nation is represented in vers. 12, 13 as cowering before their oppressors. But what encouragement God gives them: "I, even I, am He that comforteth you," &c. God overrules the doings and designs of evil men for the overwhelming of their own cause. With His protection there is no occasion for fear. Our mistake is that we "forget the Lord our Maker," while we are surrounded by oppressors; like Peter sinking in fear, while he looks at the tossing waves and withdraws his eye from his Master's form. Could we keep our eye steadily fixed on Him, no oppressor should alarm us. With Him as our Comforter, who shall be our tormentor? Moses was reluctant to undertake the task with which God charged him at the bush. But his excuses are overruled. "Certainly *I* will be with thee." In carrying out his commission his life was frequently in danger, but "God covered him in the shadow of His hand" (Heb. xi. 27). "Man is immortal till his work is done." Paul, too, was "in deaths oft," but what says God to him in his extremity? (Acts xviii. 9, 10). So, too, with Martin Luther. What a marvellous history of preservation! But for the wars in which Charles V. was engaged the Reformer would have been crushed, and the Reformation, for a time at least, frustrated. Believer, you have a gracious and omnipotent Preserver. In contending for the truth, in encountering shame and reproach, in meeting hindrances in the way of your God-given task, remember that the shadow of God's own hand is over you, and you shall not quail before your adversaries.—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

(a) We find a signal verification of this promise in the career of John Wicklyffe, the quincentenary of whose death affords a fitting occasion for reverting to the times in which he lived, and the task he was selected to perform. He was employed in a work which may fitly be described as "planting the heavens." The imagery is drawn from fixing the stakes of a tent, and we may well say that the Reformation supplied a new spiritual canopy to the world. Men's outlook into the invisible became clearer; the heavens brightened overhead, as the clouds of ignorance, spiritual tyranny, and human mediation were dispersed, and the Sun of righteousness poured His un-

obstructed rays upon the earth. No less appropriately may we speak of the Reformation as "laying the foundations of the earth." The Romish system had no firm basis; men were building on loose material, and the rubbish had to be swept away before a secure foundation could be obtained. The truth of the Gospel was overlaid with fictions and corruptions, till the Reformers dug through it to the solid rock. Wicklyffe was among the first to set to work with the pickaxe and spade. Again, of this Reformer we may say that "God put His words into his mouth." This was the source and secret of his power. At Oxford he read and studied the Latin Bible, and, in later life, made the first complete translation of it into English. Very remarkable, too, is the way in which God preserved him through persecution and sickness till his work was completed. He was suffered to live to the end of his days, and after his death his spirit lived in his writings. He gave the Scriptures to the people in their mother tongue, and no earthly power could recall that precious gift.

Let us not forget that this promise belongs to all who love and serve the Lord. We have all a mission somewhere in helping forward the new creation. God hath put His words in your mouth—words of truth and power, of life and love. He has covered you in the shadow of His hand. You are secure in the discharge of your commission. What a wondrous purpose you are chosen to subserve! Who shall frustrate God's work? Shall we not gladly yield ourselves as instruments in making this earth once more a paradise of beauty and holiness!—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

JEHOVAH'S ANGER.

li. 17, 20, 22. *The fury of the Lord, &c.* (a)

I. It is *real.* There is such a thing as anger in God. Many are the expressions used concerning it—jealousy, vengeance, fury, wrath; all to indicate its existence, and to show us that the human theories of Divine universal benevolence are not true, being got up for a purpose, and that purpose to persuade the sinner's own conscience that he need not be alarmed because of his guilt; and that no one need dread the infliction of punishment, except perhaps a few of the most wicked of our race. But God's words are not exaggerations, nor words of course. There is a terrible truth contained in these oft-repeated words of Scripture, "His anger was kindled." Loving and gracious as Jehovah is, His anger is real. When Jesus comes the second time, He comes to "take vengeance."

II. It is *righteous.* It is not the rage of selfishness, or passion, or affront. It is judicial anger; the anger of the righteous judge. It is anger against sin, against the sinner, anger because of insulted law and dishonoured righteousness. Nothing in it is unjust, or cruel, or arbitrary. Then the condemned soul will be compelled hereafter to say, "It is all right and just," it shall be right and just to all eternity.

III. It is *terrible.* Though calm, it is unutterably awful; nay, overwhelming. No power and no numbers shall be able to stand before it. It shall sweep everything before it like a whirlwind. The expulsion from paradise, the Deluge, the ruin of Sodom, are specimens of its terribleness. The lost soul shall be utterly overwhelmed. (β)

IV. It is *inexorable.* Nothing but genuine repentance shall turn it aside, or soften it when once it is kindled. "The vengeance of eternal fire," the "everlasting burning," the "worm that dieth not," these are awful words, and however figurative they may be, they represent terrible realities (H. E. I. 2804).—*Horatius Bonar, D.D.: Light and Truth, Old Testament,* p. 345.

(a) See vol. i. pp. 284–286, and H. E. I. 2288–2294. God's anger must, of course, be understood in a manner in accordance with the Divine nature; and we are not to suppose that precisely the same passions or the same feelings are referred to when this language is used of God which is implied when it is used of men. It means that His nature, His laws, His government, His feelings, are all arrayed against the wicked; that He cannot regard the conduct of the wicked with favour; that He will punish them. He is angry with the wicked continually, constantly, always. It is not excitement, it is not a temporary passion, such as we see in men. It is not sudden emotion, soon to be succeeded by a different feeling when the passion passes off. It is the steady and uniform

attribute of His unchanging nature to be always opposed to the wicked,—to all forms of sin; and in Him, in this respect, there will be no change. The wicked will find Him no more favourable to their character and course of life to-morrow than He is to-day; no more beyond the grave than this side of the tomb. . . . This is a fearful truth in regard to the sinner, and should make him tremble:—(1.) that God is angry with him—that all His character, and all the principles of His government and law, are and must be arrayed against him; and (2.), that in this respect there is to be no change; that if he continues to be wicked, as he is now, he will every day and always—this side the grave and beyond—find all the attributes of God engaged against him, and pledged to punish him. God has no attribute that can take part with sin or the sinner. —*A. Barnes, D.D.*

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the higher the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course when once it is let loose. If God should only withdraw His hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yea, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it.—*Jonathan Edwards.*

The Memorial Name.

li. 22. *Thy Lord the Lord, and thy God.*

The history, which includes the textual statement. Consider—

I. *The character which God here claims for Himself.* 1. Independent and self-existent in Being, and therefore—Infinite—fills all space; everlasting—fills all time; the source of all being.

2. Unlimited in perfection. All perfections. Infinite in each.

3. Unlimited in sovereignty. He does according to His will. His will the highest reason. None can counsel Him.

4. Unlimited in the extent of His government. None are exempted from it.

5. Himself the end of all things. Everything originates with Him. Everything terminates in Him.

II. *The limitations which men put upon the claim which is thus made by God.* They put limits upon, 1. His being. The having and worshipping false gods. That is not God which is not self-existent; and two self-existent Gods cannot be conceived.

2. His perfections. The conceptions which men form and express. The preference which man gives to the creature. The silence of man in His praise. The little imitation there is of Him. The manner in which men expect to recommend themselves to His favour. The manner in which His servants are treated.

3. On His absolute sovereignty. Confining our attention to systems of doctrine called Christian, men question God's absolute sovereignty, in the election, calling, justification, and perseverance of His people.

4. On the extent of His government. Some exclude Him from creation, providence, in prayer, conversation, conduct, civil authority, the government of the Church, and conscience.

5. As the end of all things. Men make themselves the end.

Conclusion.—He is not, and cannot be limited. In acting, He disregards the limits of men. He punishes the pride and insolence of man for limiting Him. He calls the notice of His people to the vindication of His glory. —*James Stewart: Outlines of Discourses*, pp. 3–4.

The Strength and Weakness of the Church.

(*Preached before a Presbyterian General Assembly.*)

lii. 1. *Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion.*

This language is a direct address from God to His ancient Church. The image which it presents is that of a sleeping giant. The Church of God

had been a giant power in the world; but at the time in which God speaks it had relapsed into slumber—had put off its strength, and, being beset with enemies, this position of torpor and inaction was one of peril. Hence this arousing note of alarm, "Awake, awake!" The slumbering giant is not only summoned to arouse to consciousness, but to put on and put forth his strength for conflict and for victory.

The text is a forcible reminder of the mysterious and discouraging fact that the Church of God, in all ages, may have its times of weakness, as well as its times of power. When the Church first went forth from Jerusalem, a little flock, scattered hither and thither by the storm of persecution, it was a time of power. It was then but an infant of days, but it "lifted empires off their hinges, and turned the stream of centuries out of its channel."—(*Richter.*)

But a time of weakness followed this era of power—the dark night of the middle ages. Again there came a time of power when, on the morning of the Reformation, the Church heard the cry, "Awake, awake!" and, springing up with renewed youth, it put on its strength. The chill of formalism followed the track of the Reformation, and the Church sank into the coma of wide-spread paralysis; a disguised Romanism riveted her fetters; the Socinian apostasy spread its blight over Great Britain. But then came times of power, when the Church arose in quickened majesty; and still again, times of wondrous spiritual revival, when the call sounded by Wesley and Whitefield, like the voice of the prophet in the valley of vision, seemed to awake the dead.

I. Why these periods of weakness? If the Church is a giant begirt with power, and that power is divine; if it is commissioned to exorcise the evil spirit from the world, and goes forth with the promise of help and victory, then why these times of weakness? *Answer:*—The power of the Church is divine, but it is also human. What man can do, he must do. To roll away the stone from the grave of Lazarus was something that man could do; hence our Lord commanded human hands to do it. This act of human strength must antecede the word of power which raises the dead. Divine power and human strength must work together, each in its appropriate sphere. Divine efficiency does not supersede human agency, but only supplements its weakness. If man's part in the work or warfare of the Church is properly executed, God's part will never fail. But, as the terror of the iron chariots of the enemy paralysed the strength of Judah—so that, the human part being wanting, the victory was lost (Judg. i. 19)—so, in the Church, if any cause supervenes to weaken, or render ineffective, the strength which God expects us to put forth, He will not depart from His plan, or interpose to save us from the result of our own weakness, or to hide us from the scorn and derision of the world.

II. What is the strength of the Church, and when is it put off?

1. *The first element of power is the Gospel.* This is the one element for our work, the one weapon for our warfare—it is the power of God. The astronomer looks at the heavens. These stars are to be counted; these constellations are to be mapped; the orbits of these planets are to be observed. Here is a vast and complicated work; but how is it to be done? By the telescope. He has this, and nothing else. All the great results of astronomy must spring, first of all, from this single instrument. Just so the Church looks out upon its work. It is commissioned to bring this world in captivity to the obedience of Christ. A mighty and multiform work; how is it to be achieved? By the Gospel. God has given us this, and nothing else, to save the world. It is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." "It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." Moses was commanded to smite the rock at Horeb, and bring from its bosom streams of water. How? He was given but one instrument—the slender rod that he held in his hand

To human view the rock would be more likely to break the rod than the rod to rend the rock; but that fragile rod was God's ordained instrument of power; and, when it smote, the riven rock gushed with the living waters. Just so, the Word of God is the rod of power. We are commanded to smite with it alone, for by nothing else can the stony heart be broken. For every work which the Church is sent to do, this is the instrument of power.

This being so, we can readily see from this standpoint how this strength may be put off, and power give place to weakness. To neglect, to withhold, to minimise, to obscure in any manner the truth of God, is to put off this element of power, and to bring in a time of weakness.

This may occur (1.) *When the truth is depreciated, or its necessity not clearly recognised.* Thus, for example, some say, "Preach morality; let us hear more about the duties of life, and less about the doctrines of the Cross." Morality, without principle, is a sham; it is tinselled fruit tied upon a Christmas-tree—the only connection is the tape that ties it. Morality is the fruit of principle, but principle is doctrine—and the only doctrine that bears this fruit is the doctrine of the Cross. (2.) *Whenever the Gospel is subordinated to human themes.* If the Church dispenses essays upon history, antiquities, philosophy, politics, science, or reflects the light of the secular press, &c., it will be no marvel if it sinks into imbecility. (3.) *Our strength is crippled when the Gospel is caricatured by sensational themes, discussions, illustrations and expedients, which attract attention, indeed, but which belittle the sacred doctrine of the Cross.*

But whilst causes like these paralyse our power, there *are others which produce simply an abatement of strength.* For example, the Church can only put forth half its strength when the Gospel is but half told. If it sets out in full light the Divine love, whilst it keeps back Divine justice under the shadow of a dark eclipse; if it tells of Christ's teachings, and is silent about Christ's sacrifice; if it points to Christ's life, and not to Christ's blood, as the centre of saving efficiency; if it sets out the freedom of man, and holds in abeyance Divine sovereignty and efficacious grace; or if it minimises the Gospel in the one sentence, "Come to Jesus;" or if it lays Christ as a humble suppliant at the feet of men until proud sinners imagine that it is a stoop of condescension to permit Jesus to save them—then, surely, it is no marvel that men turn away from a belittled Gospel and a belittled Saviour, and that the Church sits in weakness.

2. *The second element is the ministry.* Let us not lose sight of the figure of the text. The Church is a giant; the Gospel is the instrument of his work—the weapon of his warfare. But what wields the weapon? The giant's arm—this is the ministry. It is the arm or the agent of the Church's power. The symbol of the Gospel is a hammer, a word; but a hammer is powerless without a strong hand to use it; the sword is ineffective without a skilful arm to wield it. This arm, this sword, this agent of strength and skill, is the ministry.

This figure seems to describe accurately the kind of power with which the ministry is invested. It is not an original power inherent in itself, but a delegated power. It is the power of an agent, and it has an instrument of power put into its hands. It is not a power to infuse grace, or to forgive sins, or to bind the conscience, but simply an administrative power. It is a power of vocation to utter the Gospel call, to summon God's sons from afar, and His daughters from the ends of the earth. A teaching power—go teach all nations; preach the Gospel to every creature. A dispensing power to break the Bread of Life, and to distribute, with a liberal hand, to all God's children, giving to each a portion in due season. A power to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.

We may readily see when this strength is put on, and when it is put off. Whatever cripples or weakens or

interferes with the right use and proper functions of a giant's arm, weakens and abates the effectiveness of the giant himself; so whatever weakens the ministry, or hinders its effectiveness, puts off to that extent the strength of the Church, and introduces a time of weakness and defeat. (1.) The ministry, as an arm of power, may be withered by a perfunctory education. Ministers may be taught to know about God, but not to know God. They may learn to explain and defend the Gospel, without having ever felt that a single Gospel truth has been riveted as a living, burning power in their own souls. A minister who knows what it is to be a saved sinner, can tell of it with such power as to make others feel that there is nothing between them and eternal death but the blood of Jesus. But, without this experience, the minister will be a perfunctory drone, stepping in a treadmill, or doing out his lifeless essay whilst sinners are slipping through his fingers into perdition. (2.) The ministry must be a source of weakness instead of power to the Church, if it is not in sympathy with the hearts of the people, and the souls of perishing men. He who was once lost but is found again, will know how to feel for the lost, and the lost will listen to him who once was lost himself. This is the natural power of the minister, the link of sympathy that binds him to the hearts of the people and the souls of men. If this be lost the ministry is powerless.

3. *The third and principal element of the Church's power is the Holy Ghost.* The implement of the Church's work is the Word; the arm of the Church's power is the ministry; but the power itself is the Holy Ghost. As He causeth the earth to bring forth and bud by showers from heaven, so He causes His Church to abound in the fruits of righteousness by times of refreshing from on high. A revival is a day of the Spirit's power, when the enemy is repulsed; when sinners are made willing; when doubt and unbelief are dissipated. If such a day of power were granted to us now, you would see rationalism, scepticism, and infidelity driven like smoke before the wind.

III. Such being the elements of the Church's power, and the causes which convert its strength into weakness, **let us now listen to God's call to the Church to put on and put forth her strength.** "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion!" An army puts on its strength when it goes forth to battle, but this is strength to destroy. A fireman puts on his strength when he enters a burning dwelling, and plucks its sleeping inmates from the flames. This is strength to save. Oh, it is a glorious thing to put on strength to save! *How, then, shall we put on this strength?*

Physical strength is put on in one way, and spiritual strength in another. Some seem to imagine that they have only to arouse and stir themselves into an agony of effort. Samson arose and shook himself, and thought he would go forth and smite the Philistines, as aforetime; but, alas! the strength was not there—it had departed from him. So the Church may shake herself and advance to the conflict, but the strength is not there; the Philistines are upon her, and she wists not that the Lord has departed. This is not the way! One who is physically strong is conscious of his strength, but one who is spiritually strong is conscious of nothing but weakness. Spiritual power, in its first element, is the sense of our own weakness.

No man ever puts on spiritual strength except on his knees. It was there that the apostles found it. When Peter stood forth and preached to the multitude, that day of Pentecost was a day of power; it was the Spirit's power; but how did the apostles put it on? Upon their knees; in those days of prayer, in the upper chamber in Jerusalem. It is upon our knees that the Church must put on its strength! Then shall our work be "mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds."—*W. M. Paxton, D.D.*

The Work and Strength of the Church.

(Sermon preached before an Association of Churches.)

lii. 1. *Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion.*

Isaiah prophesied more than a hundred years before the captivity of Israel. Many of his predictions had to do with its termination. In his inspired anticipation, the period of Israel's desolation is now coming to a close, and the day of their redemption is drawing nigh. Hence, in these latter chapters, he calls upon the exiles, under the figure of a captive female, to arise from the ground on which she has been sitting, to shake herself from the dust with which she has been covered, to lay aside all the emblems of her degradation, and prepare to return to the enjoyment of freedom and prosperity in the land of her fathers. By a figure still bolder, he summons the holy land and the holy city to clothe themselves in their best attire, and get ready for the reception of the liberated captive. Frequently he employs the proper names, Zion and Jerusalem, in their literal sense; but at other times Jerusalem is put for its inhabitants, and Zion represents the worshippers of the true God. In this latter sense I employ the term Zion now. In the preceding chapter we see the chosen people in a suppliant attitude, sending up to heaven the cry—"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." In the text we listen to the responsive command of heaven, addressed to the praying Church,—"Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion."

More than five-and-twenty centuries have passed away since the echo of these words first fell on expecting ears; but there is a sense in which they are as much needed by the Church of our day as by the Zion to and for which Isaiah spoke and wrote.

I. The Work which the Church has to do.

1. *It has millions of heathen yet to evangelise.* The kingdom which the Messiah came to set up, was to be bounded only by the globe; its subjects only by the entire race. But before it can reach its destined universality, its gospel must be proclaimed to all men, and the gods many and lords many of idolatry's empire must be destroyed. That is part of the work which Christ has intrusted to His Church. Glorious harvests have been reaped as the result of the Church's toil. But large portions of the earth have yet to be won to our Saviour King. From the entire regions of darkness and death that are still under the dominion of false gods, it is computed that forty immortal beings go into eternity every minute, more than 2000 every hour, and more than 50,000 every day. Fifty thousand human beings daily hastening to a tribunal of which they never heard, and ushered into the presence of a God they never knew, because His own Church has hitherto failed to make Him known to the ends of the earth!

2. *It has the Mohammedan imposture yet to overthrow.* The mosque still stands on the very mount of God's selection, where once Solomon worshipped, where Isaiah prophesied, where Asaph sung, and where Jesus taught. Nearly one hundred millions of the earth's population are daily heard uttering the watchword—"There is one God, and Mahommed is His prophet." Never must we consider the Church's work done until the crescent be made to give way to the cross, and the followers of the false prophet be brought to worship Jesus as the sent of God and the only Saviour of men.

3. *It has multitudes of the Jews yet to convert to the faith of Christ.* It is calculated that nearly six millions and a half of the seed of Abraham are, at this time, scattered about in the different nations of the earth. These must be sought, and instructed, and entreated until they are won to Christ.

4. *It has the Papal apostasy to oppose.* As far from "the truth as it is in Jesus" is it now as when our own Wicklyffe began to protest against its errors. As dishonourable to God, as injurious to society, as corruptive of morals, as dangerous to souls, as when Luther hurled at the whole system the thunders of his righteous indignation.

5. *It has a growing infidelity to confront.*

6. *It has to meet and resist a form of religion which, while it holds fast the name of Christianity, denies and denounces most of its distinctive doctrines.* I refer to that system which would pluck the crown of Deity from the Saviour's brow, and reduce Him to the level of a mere man.

7. *It has a vast region of indifference to invade.* Wrapped in the slumbers of a spiritual death, multitudes care for none of these things.

8. *It has a false liberalism to contend against.* The parties that espouse this cause have a creed, and it runs somewhat in this strain—"There is something good in all religions: no church is perfect, nor persons either: it matters not what sect a man belongs to, so that he has charity in his soul, and observes justice in his dealings: it matters not what doctrines a man believes, so that he is honest in his belief, for—this condition complied with—he may be an infidel and yet be saved.' We must not let this evil go unchecked and unopposed. It is wrong in itself, it is dangerous and destructive in its tendency—and hence, as the witnesses for God, we must work to stop its progress and to neutralise its mischiefs.

9. *It has certain tendencies of the age to keep in check.* Such as *the growing worldliness of professors of religion—the growing love of gaiety, amusements, and pleasure,* which often leads to dangerous associations and the desecration of the Sabbath—*a spirit of daring speculation in trade—the deification of reason,* which leads men to treat Gospel doctrines as they would mathematical problems, to question when they ought to believe, and to reject what they cannot comprehend—*the rage for novelties,* which begets a restless dissatisfaction with old truths however sound, and old ways however safe—*the irreverence with which sacred things are treated and spoken of.*

10. *It has lost ground to regain.* The cause of spiritual religion has not kept pace with the progress which has been made in other things. Where, in some cases, the external machinery of religion has been pushed forward, there is reason to fear that the inward life of it has been "sick and ready to die."

These are some of the claims which the times now passing over us present to the activities of the Church; and if the Church had nothing more to do than what has now been stated, it must be evident at a glance that its work is one of great magnitude and vast responsibility. The requirements of the case cannot be met by feeble resolves, low aims, or weak efforts. A Church asleep will not do for it. A Church reposing on the lap of its own privileges will not do for it. "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion."

II. IN WHAT THE STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH CONSISTS: AND HOW IT SHOULD PUT IT ON.

1. The first element of its renewed strength must be sought in *its waking up to a sense of its past neglects and its present duties.* Misconceptions on these points will be fatal to its power.

2. *The Church's love to Christ must be augmented.* What was the secret of Apostolic doing, daring, and suffering? It was love—"the love of Christ constraining us." Could we but get the same hallowed fire in our hearts—could we but get it to burn on, with a steady, constant, and augmenting flame, no service would be a weariness to us, no sacrifice a hardship, and no labour commanded by our Divine Master would be refused or neglected. If we can but get our hearts filled with the expansive and impulsive energy of Divine love, we shall soon be clad in the mantle of Divine strength.

3. *There must be an increase of faith.* Our warfare is the fight of faith, and our work is the work of faith. The Master whom we serve is the invisible

God; the rewards we expect are unseen and future. The results of our labours are uncertain, except as we anticipate them by faith. Our obstacles are seen, our difficulties are felt. The natural exclamation of conscious weakness is—the work is too great for us. Too great indeed it would be, if we had to do it alone. But Omnipotence is pledged to help us, and success is guaranteed by Divine promise. We must have faith in that promise. Going forth strong in the power of faith, we may expect to see much greater things than we have ever yet beheld.

4. *There must be an increase of fervent prayer.* First must we become princes with God, and then shall we prevail with men. The Holy Spirit is given in answer to prayer. The special outpouring of that Spirit on the Church in its infancy, was preceded by special prayer. Gifts, zeal, activity, eloquence, fervour, will all be in vain without the Spirit of God. What the steam is to the engine, and what the winds of heaven are to the canvas-clad vessel, the influences of the Spirit are to the plans and activities of the Church. Without these influences there may be much husbandry but no harvest, much work but no progress. The known readiness of the Spirit to help and bless, should not supersede prayer but stimulate it.

5. *There must be a deepened sense of personal responsibility.* When charged with past neglects and sins, we must not attempt to shift the blame from ourselves and fasten it upon others. "Against Thee, O Lord, have *I* sinned, and done evil in Thy sight." With respect to the future and its duties, we must be on our guard against being deluded by what may become to us the fiction of *the Church.* When we speak of the Church's work and responsibilities, we must not give the least indulgence to the idea that we are speaking of some imaginary being or body, altogether separate and distinct from ourselves. The Church is composed of individual Christians, and the only responsibility of the Church as a whole is that which is brought into it by the individual responsibility of its separate members. Go daily to the throne of God with the inquiry—"Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do?" Be willing that God should answer it in any way He sees fit; and then as soon as it is answered, do *that* thing, whatever it may be, do it willingly, do it diligently, do it well.

6. *There must be enlarged liberality* As compared with the givings of some bygone ages, the present scale of contributions to the cause of God may be admitted to be liberal. But what is given now, in a general way, bears but small proportion to what was given by the devout Jew to meet the requirements of the ceremonial law. The givings of both rich and poor to the cause of Popery—the princely sums of English earls, and the hard-earned pennies of Irish labourers—might well shame the stinted offerings of those who profess a purer faith. The sacrifices made by deluded multitudes in the worship of their false gods, make our ordinary rate of giving appear more like an insult than an offering. The servants of sin give incomparably more to the cause of corruption and death, than do the servants of the living God to the cause of religion and salvation. How will rich professors answer for themselves before God, who hoard up wealth for themselves and their heirs, and leave the cause of God to languish and die for want of support? The Church's work will not be done until those of His servants, whom He makes stewards of His wealth, shall honour Him with something better than "the crumbs" which fall from their own table.

7. *There must be more directness of aim in the pulpit.* To preach *before* a congregation is one thing, to preach *to* it is another To preach to men *in the mass*, is the method of some, to preach so as to make each man feel—*it is I*, was the method of Paul (Col. i. 28).

8. *There must be more of a devout and teachable spirit in the pew.* The extravagant and often ridiculous demand for "talent" in the pulpit, must be moderated. When this is made the

alpha and omega of ministerial fitness, of course the people take upon themselves to judge whether or not it exists in sufficient measure. Hence many go to the house of God, not to be instructed, edified in the faith, helped on in their way to heaven; but to sit in judgment on the preacher's intellectual powers, that they may go and pronounce for or against what they have heard. Spiritual growth is the last thing thought of and least cared about. But this must be altered before Christians will advance and churches will work as they ought to do. When our people come to a right state of mind on this subject, they will think that man the best minister whose preaching brings the greatest number of souls to Christ, and is most successful in promoting the knowledge, purity, consistency, and usefulness of his flock. Men who really want to do God's work, will feel that they have no time to waste in fruitless criticisms; and that human life is far too precious a thing to be frittered away in either compliments or complaints of God's workmen.

9. *The promotion of family piety must be made more a matter of business at home.*

10. *There must be more of mutual sympathy between Christians and churches.* There must be co-operation for mutual support and for aggressive work in the name of Christ.—*John Corbin.*

The Perils and Strength of the Church.

lii. 1. *Awake, awake, put on thy strength.*

The words of the text were addressed by God to His people when in a state of peril. The enemy, like Delilah, about taking advantage of their drowsy condition, to deprive them of their strength.

I. The command uttered to the Church.

"Awake, awake." The words, though indicating the low condition of the Church, in reference to its moral and spiritual mission, are still consoling; they prove that it was not dead. It was sleeping, and life is an essential condition of sleep. The Church at the time was in the nearest position possible for the living to be to the dead. Sleep resembles death in many respects. But it is not death. Hence the propriety of the command.

Why the Church to-day should obey the command. 1. "Awake, awake," *because the foundations of thy faith are threatened.* Threats spring from various sources—from the sceptical teachings of the age, from the oscillation of its own members, and especially from the fact, that so many of its teachers endeavour to persuade men that it matters not what they believe if they live properly. This is an attempt to deprive the Church of the fundamental truths of its creed that have enabled it to stand the storms of persecutions, that inspired its reformers, clothed its martyrs with power to suffer death on its behalf, and form the basis of this grand edifice the Christian Church (1 Cor. iii. 11).

2. "Awake, awake," *because there are elements within thee that rapidly lead to apostasy, decay.* The injury received by the Church from without, compared with that done within, is but very little. Joshua and his people had many evils to withstand and powerful enemies to conquer in taking the fortified cities of Canaan; but they had a greater loss and more shame through the action of Achan in their own camp than from all the enemies without. There are things still in the Church that demand that it should listen to the alarm of our text. (1.) The *ritualistic tendencies* of a great number of its members. People that think more of the form than the spirit of the service, more of the person that speaks, than what he says; that clothe themselves in the ritual of religion and feel satisfied. (2.) "*Worldliness.*" This evil principle manifests itself in various forms in Church life. There are some people that join the

Church for mercenary purposes. Religion in our days is considered so respectable a thing, that a profession of it gives a person reputation, and helps him on; but mark this, it is possible to obtain a reputation by a mere profession of Christianity, and at the same time be void of its power (2 Tim. iii. 5). It manifests itself also in the lack of liberality, shown by many of its members in sustaining its funds. The poorer classes cannot afford to contribute large sums for this purpose; but when we find people enjoying all the luxuries of life and contributing meagrely towards the funds of the Church of the Most High, we feel it our duty to deal plainly with them. What converted Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, brought Haman to the gallows, and sent "Demas" out of the Church into the world? Worldliness! And worldliness will again affect its victims in a similar manner, and the presence of such an enemy in the Church is a sufficient reason that it should listen to the voice of its Maker in our text. (3.) *The carelessness of a great number of its members with reference to purity of life.* The standard of Christian morality is certainly too low in the minds of thousands of our fellow-Christians. The ripe fruits that adorn the Christian life (Gal. v. 22, 23) are unknown to many professing Christians in our day.

In the presence of many enemies, the duty of the Church is clearly defined. "Awake, awake, put on thy strength." She need not seek power outside her own resources. "Put on thy beautiful garments." Open thine own wardrobe, clothe thyself in thine own apparel, that thy beauty and power may be perceptible.

II. IN WHAT DOES THE STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH CONSIST?

1. *In its devoting itself entirely to the work which it has to perform.* The work of consecrating oneself to the moral and spiritual objects of the Church is too often neglected in these days. Remember, it is the men who entirely devoted themselves to the Lord's service, independent of their own personal interest and safety, or of the sect or party to which they were connected, who have left their mark on the kingdom of evil.

2. *In meditation.* There is nothing so effectual to inspire the mind, and clothe the soul with courage, as meditation on the Lord's dealings with His children (Ps. lxxvii. 11–20).

3. *Prayer.* With this the Church on earth is able to command the forces of heaven to the battle-field to fight on its behalf (2 Chron. xx.)

4. *The word of God*, which is called by Paul "the sword of the Spirit," and is the offensive weapon of the Church. The Christian armour consists of both defensive and offensive weapons (Eph. vi.), and the Church is commanded to take "the *whole* armour of God, that it may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."—*J. P. Williams.*

I. Put on strength by wakefulness. Sleep of the body, up to a certain point, is needful and wholesome; but beyond that it is harmful. The drowsiness of the sluggard is injurious. Still more hurtful is spiritual drowsiness. A slumbering life results in moral death. Sleepy men are the easy prey of false teachers; their moral vision is obscured, and they do not easily discern between the true and the false; their critical faculties are paralysed, and they are not in a condition to "try the spirits," whether they be of God. These times require men who are awake. The first two words of the text are not to be disconnected from the others, for by wakefulness we do put on strength. Awake from your dreams, open your eyes to behold the realities of life, and address yourselves to the duties to which God calls you.

II. Put on strength by activity. Activity develops strength—of body, of mind, of soul. Slothfulness is the secret and the cause of the spiritual weakness that abounds in our churches. What God requires of us is that by exercise we should develop the strength with which we have been endowed. It is not our possession of

only one talent that He condemns; it is our having neglected to make use of it. Remember also, that God's command to do a thing always implies His promise of help to well-directed endeavour. The Saviour said, "Stretch forth thy hand!" the obedient man obtained his reward, and found that the Divine word of command is a word of promise to the obedient. The prophet says to the weak, "Put on thy strength;" and, obeying, they shall rejoice in a refreshing baptism of Divine energy. Out of weakness, those who have obeyed this command have been made strong by the processes of spiritual development. To the development of the physical powers there are limits; but to the development of moral power there is none. Here there may be constant growth and progress. Eternity will be but an ampler sphere for the enlargement of the soul's vast powers.

III. Put on thy strength by joyfulness. Joy, and not sadness, should be the characteristic of those whose final destiny is heaven. Joy begets strength, and strength increases joy. Put on thy beautiful garments of holiness and joy, O Zion! remembering always that the truly holy are the solidly and permanently joyful.

IV. Put on thy strength by hopefulness. The despairing are weak, the hopeful are strong. In view of God's promises made for her encouragement, the Church may well be hopeful. There is one in our text, which we may read, "For henceforth there shall no more come *against* thee the uncircumcised and unclean." Though oftentimes we stand on the towers of Zion as timid, fearful watchers, with little faith in the Divine promise of protection, the Church is safe (Zech. ii. 5). Let us, then, be hopeful, let us be strong for the work and the warfare to which we are called.—*W. Burrows, B.A.*

The Threefold Trumpet-blast.

lii. 1. *Awake, awake, &c.*

It is to the Church of Christ sleeping that the threefold trumpet-blast of the text comes.

I. A CALL TO WAKEFULNESS AND WATCHFULNESS. "Awake, awake!" Zion never needed this trumpet-call more imperatively than now. Upon her the "spirit of slumber" has fallen. But all are not asleep; and those who are awake should take the trumpet, and with a blast as loud and as long as though life and immortality were at stake (see Ezek. xxxiii. 3) sound the alarm. For, 1. *The foundations of our faith are threatened.* The sappers and miners are at work inside as well as outside; and they would delight to remove the corner-stones and shake the whole fabric of the temple of truth.

2. "*The enemy is coming like a flood*"—in the shape of intemperance, vice, greed, infidelity, and horrible wickedness, enough to afflict our souls and affright the world. (See the daily papers.)

3. *Is not the visible Church drifting from Christ?* We need to be on our guard against both enemies without and subtle traitors within; traitors who, themselves wakeful, are imposing on those who are in a state of unconscious slumber. (1.) Is not one section of society drifting to Rome? Ritualism is rampant, loud-voiced, defiant. Roman Catholicism walks abroad in the light of day, and flaunts her flags in the eyes of all men. Think of her pilgrimages, her noble perverts, and her persistent policy of aggression, and ask what it all means. (2.) Is not another section drifting fast into Rationalism? The so-called "men of culture" are almost all of them Rationalists, either covertly or avowed. Men like the late Strauss, in theology; Buckle, in history; our own J. Stuart Mill, in philosophy; with Professors Tyndall and Huxley, in science. These, and men of kindred sympathies and sentiments, are the foremost leaders of thought in

our day, and their whole following are being led, some willingly, some unconsciously, into the bleak regions of Rationalism, if not into blank Atheism. (3.) Is not still another section, by far the largest, too, drifting into utter worldliness? Is not the spirit of the world dominant? Is not indifferentism in relation to religion painfully apparent?—Is there not too much reason to fear that, on these three waves, society in England—including a large section of the visible Church—is drifting from Christ?

II. THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO GIRD HERSELF FOR CONFLICT. "Put on thy strength, O Zion!" She is within reach of strength enough to vanquish every foe. Let all her members, individually and collectively, put on, 1. The strength of personal consecration. 2. The strength of spiritual unity. "Unity is strength." The powers of evil are united. The Church cannot afford to be split up into contending sects. We must present ourselves as an unbroken phalanx to the foe. See our Lord's high-priestly prayer (John xvii.). What might not a united consecrated Church do? 3. The strength of "the arm of the Lord" (Isa. li. 9). The strength belongs to the Church, and is available by prayer, which moves the arm that moves the world; by faith, which takes hold of the strength of God, and has omnipotence at its command (Is. xxvii. 5). "All things are possible to him that believeth."

III. THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO CLOTHE HERSELF WITH SPIRITUAL BEAUTY. "Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem." The Church has provided for her a spiritual wardrobe. Put on, 1. *The garment of a "meek and quiet spirit."* Rest in God. Calmness and tranquillity of mind are at once evidences and sources of power. 2. *The garment of holiness.* This is the most beautiful garment of all, while holiness is also the measure of spiritual power. 3. *The garment of heavenly zeal.* Men of the world and the emissaries of evil are zealous. We must meet them with a zeal greater and more divine.

Let the Church of Christ thus awake, put on her strength, and clothe herself with spiritual beauty, and she need not fear for the future. Victory is sure.

The command of the text comes to individual churches. (1.) Let each of us take it as the voice of God to himself. (2.) Let us awake promptly: life is passing, and the evil growing. (3.) Let us avail ourselves of all available strength and beauty. (4.) Let us make our consecration in sight of the cross and crown (Heb. xiii. 20).—*The Study*, 1874, p. 723.

The condition of Judea—conquered, degraded, captive, indifferent to Zion, feeble—no courage, temple demolished, &c., byeword and reproach.

I. THE THREEFOLD EXHORTATION OF THE TEXT.

1. "*Awake, awake.*" Sleep often too accurately describes the condition of God's Church. Many are at ease in Zion. The prophets prophesy smooth things, and the people love to have it so. They cry, "a little more sleep," &c. But if the work of life is to be done, we must awake to a sense of our duty. It was whilst men slept that the adversary sowed the tares. During a period of spiritual apathy, what injury has been inflicted! Awake to the work of the soul, the evil of sin, &c. In commerce, &c., how wakeful men are!

2. "*Put on thy strength.*" The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, and the expulsion of the enemy from the holy city, required strength. We are called to be strong in the Lord. The times call for a robust piety. Were God's people to put forth their strength, what success would be achieved, how soon would be ushered in "the new heavens, and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." In embattled array against the Church, are the ten thousand forms of vice and scepticism, of sin and error.

3. "*Put on thy beautiful garments.*" The Church is to be attractive. The unloveliness of Christians is often apparent. The beauty of the Church is her holiness.

II. THE HAPPY EFFECTS OF OBEDIENCE.

The Church will be the home, 1, of the regenerate; 2, of the entirely sanctified.—*Benjamin Browne.*

I. AN INVENTORY OF THE BELIEVER'S WARDROBE. 1. The robe of *righteousness* (ch. lxi. 10; Ps. cxxxii. 9). How beautiful this robe. "Bring forth the best robe." It covers completely, unlike scanty garments in which men array themselves. 2. The garment of *humility* (1 Pet. v. 5). This is well-pleasing in God's sight. He hates flaunting garments of pride. It is a Christlike virtue (Phil. ii. 8). 3. The garment of *praise* (ch. lxi. 3). This is a beautiful robe. One of the same kind is worn by angels. 4. The garment of *gladness* (Ps. xxx. 11; Phil. iv. 4).

1. These garments can always be worn; there is a dress *reserved*—a bridal dress, the wedding garment—to be worn at the marriage supper of the Lamb. White robe of redeemed. Symbol of purity, victory, joy. 2. These soul garments never wear out 3. They cost us nothing. 4. In addition to dress, some people like to wear ornaments,—harmless weakness, when not carried to excess. The believer is exhorted to adorn himself with the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." This can be worn without exciting envy or vanity.

II. THE EXHORTATION CONCERNING THESE GARMENTS.

Wear them. You cannot get better. You dishonour the Giver by not wearing them. You set light store by His gifts.—*T. E. R.*

JERUSALEM A TYPE OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

lii. 1. *Jerusalem the holy city.*

Consider the ancient Jerusalem in its typical representation of the Church of Christ.

I. *It was the city of the Divine choice* (Ps. cxxxii. 13–18). The Church is the choice of the Lord; it contains the united congregation of His saints, those who have been called by His Gospel, who have believed in His Son, and who have been the living partakers of His heavenly grace. Over these God rejoiceth. With these He has His delights. Unto these He manifests Himself as He doth not unto the world. (See John xiv. 23; 1 Pet. i. 23, 24.)

II. *It was the city of Divine rule and authority.* Here God made known His laws and judgments; deposited His living oracles, His holy statutes; revealed His will, and recorded His blessed word. And by these the inhabitants of Jerusalem were to be governed. Obedience to these secured the favourable tokens of God's love and favour. So in the new Jerusalem of His Church. Here He has revealed His holy will, not by the oracle, or over the material mercy-seat, but by His own Son, and by making His living Church the pillar and ground of truth. By depositing within it the doctrines, and ordinances, and commandments of the Gospel. And the divine presence and favour is only secured by unswerving fidelity to the charge with which God has intrusted her.

III. *Jerusalem was the city of Divine services.* Here met the tribes of Israel who came to worship before the Lord. Here were presented the sacrifices and offerings of the people. Here God was worshipped and adored. Here the voice of prayer and praise was heard in God's holy temple. Here the religious festivals were celebrated, and God honoured in His sacred institutions. Such is the Church of Christ, the Jerusalem, &c. Here those who have believed, and are of the saved, are united together in the holy bonds of fellowship and love. Here they meet to observe all things their Divine Head has commanded them (Acts ii. 41).

IV. *Jerusalem was the city of Divine*

blessing. His special love and care was directed to it (Ps. lxxxvii. 2). His providential benignity surrounded it. The Lord was the keeper and protector of the holy city. Within it He poured down the blessings of His grace, and caused His favour to dwell, even life for evermore. (See His gracious engagements and promises, Ps. cxxxii. 15, &c.) So God pre-eminently blesses His spiritual Zion. Unto His people He gives exceedingly great and precious promises. They are blessed with the unsearchable blessings of His grace, with all the fulness of His love, with all the blessings of providence. God supplies all their need. Defends from all their enemies, and keeps and saves unto eternal life.

V. *Jerusalem was a city of distinguished immunities and privileges.* It was an honour to have been born in her. Her sons were freemen of the most favoured city under heaven. Her inhabitants had numerous opportunities of enjoying religious services, they had the presence of the priests and teachers of the law of God. "Happy were the people in such a case," &c. Still greater and more precious the immunities and privileges of the people of God. They enjoy spiritual liberty, have exalted titles, and possess immunities of the most glorious and heavenly character. Access to God's gracious throne. The sweet fellowship of His Holy Spirit. Delightful seasons of refreshing from the Divine presence, and experimental overflowings of that peace which passeth all understanding.

APPLICATION.—1. Are we the citizens of the Jerusalem from above? Have we been born in her? Born from above? &c. Do we possess the spirit of her heavenly inhabitants? 2. How great the responsibility of such. It is theirs to exhibit the glory of divine grace, in calling and saving them, by a conversation which becometh the Gospel of Christ. "To show forth His praises," &c. To pray for her peace, and to labour for her prosperity. To display the spirit of love and harmony towards all the citizens, and to yield loyal subjection and hearty obedience to Christ the rightful Lord and King. 3. Unlike the earthly Jerusalem, she shall never become a prey to her enemies. Her walls shall never be cast down, nor her streets become waste (Matt. xvi. 18).—*Jabez Burns, D.D.: Types and Metaphors*, pp. 83–85.

SELLING AND REDEEMING THE SOUL.

lii. 3. *For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought, &c.*

The Jews had gone headlong into sin, and as a punishment they had been carried captive to Babylon. They found that iniquity did not pay. Cyrus seized Babylon, and felt such pity for the captives, that without any compensation he let them go home. All of this is typical of a higher truth.

I. "*Ye have sold yourselves for nought.*" There are persons who do not seem to belong either to themselves or to God; the title-deeds have been passed over to "the world, the flesh, and the devil;" but the purchaser has never paid up. They have made over their entire nature, but the holders of the deeds, when called on for the money, declare themselves bankrupt. The world does not keep its promises; it does not pay ninety per cent., nor twenty, nor one; it gives no solace when friends die; no peace when conscience rings its alarm. "Ye have sold yourselves for nought;" your conscience went; your hope went; your Bible went; your heaven went, all for nothing.

II. "*Ye shall be redeemed without money.*" You were cheated out of your soul; the world has no right to take the title-deed from you. It can be proved. You need not say you are afraid of lawsuits, they are so expensive; for "ye shall be redeemed *without money.*"

Money is good for a great deal, but it cannot do anything in this matter of the soul. *Blood* is here the only

lawful tender. Neither is our blood rich enough; it needs a sinless stream. We have in this day some who do not want a religion of blood; but the Bible says, "In the blood is the life;" and an apostle (1 Pet. i. 18, 19). You put your lancet into the arm of our holy religion and withdraw the blood, and you leave it a mere corpse! No blood, no atonement, as prefigured in the Levitical sacrifices; "without shedding of blood there is no remission." Some one says, "the thought of blood sickens me." God intended it to sicken you with your sin; *your* sin caused Christ's blood-shedding.

The highest price ever paid for anything was paid for your soul. The estranged property is bought back. Take it; "ye have sold yourselves for nought, and ye shall be redeemed without money." Here is the price of your liberation—not money, but blood.—*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.: Christian Age*, vol. ix. pp. 67–69.

Briefly review the circumstances under which these words were spoken. Israel had sold themselves as slaves, and for nothing. They were to be restored without money (ch. xlv. 13). All this equally applicable to us to-day. Israel's captivity was temporal, ours is spiritual, and our redemption by Christ is "without money." These words suggest—

I. SELLING THE SOUL. "Ye have sold yourselves for nought."

1. *What you have sold.* Not your wares, your possessions, &c., but "yourselves." "Not the body, not the mere bundle of intellectual faculties, but the conscience, the moral *ego*, the inner man," that which works the faculties and which will live when the body is dust. It is your *soul* you have sold—the most precious thing God has given you—the gem of creation—the grand mark of man—the great possession. Put all the splendours of the visible creation into the scale, one soul outweighs them all (P. D. 3204). How many never think of the value of their soul, but sell it for the merest trifle.

2. *To whom you have sold yourselves.* To Satan. The worst being in God's universe—the enemy of God and man—the enslaver and destroyer of souls (2 Tim. ii. 26; Eph. ii. 1, 2; Rom. vi. 17–19). To do his deadly work, and to be led captive at his will.

3. *For what you have sold yourselves.* (1.) *For worldly pleasure.* But that is "nought"—unsatisfying, vanishing, leaves an aching void the world can never fill (ch. lv. 2; H. E. I. 4609–4612). (2.) *For worldly wealth.* But that is "nought"—will soon take wings and fly away. Wealth is not happiness—cannot procure the elixir of immortality—often degrades. Wealth is useless when, like Esau, we are "at the point to die" (Luke xii. 15; Mark viii. 36; H. E. I. 4358–4365, 4382–4386, 4389–4411). (3.) *For worldly fame.* But that is "nought." At best it is unsatisfying. Charles Lamb had fame, and what did he say? "I walk up and down thinking I am happy, but knowing I am not." The great Dr. Johnson had fame, and what did he say? "I am afraid that some day I shall get crazy." Such testimonies multiply daily. Verily, "all is vanity," &c. (Ecc. ii. 11).

4. *Who sold you?* "Yourselves." (1.) It is a *voluntary* bargain. You cannot blame Adam, for, had you been in his place, you would have acted like him, &c. You love sin and sinful pleasures. (2.) It is an *unjust* bargain. Reason and conscience say you have no right to sell your soul, for it belongs to God. "All souls are mine" (Heb. xii. 9; 1 Cor. vi. 19). (3.) You must confess that you have made a *bad* bargain, and that the outcome of it is deception, disappointment, embarrassment, &c. (Hos. viii. 7).

II. REDEEMING THE SOUL.

1. *The redemption of the soul could not be effected by any human means.* The state of fallen man was so desperate that there was no hope for him in himself—no redeeming principle in his apostate nature; no possible way by which he could pay the price of his ransom. Nothing that the whole universe could offer, would be accepted =

the price of it (Mic. vi. 6, 7; Luke vii. 42). Obedience to the moral law could not secure it, for it has been broken, and whatever man did in the way of righteousness, he would render no more than is absolutely due to God; besides, he is unable to obey it perfectly (Acts xiii. 39; Rom. v. 6, viii. 8, iii. 20, 28; Gal. ii. 16, &c.)

2. *The redemption of the soul was effected by the Son of God.* In man's desperate circumstances Divine mercy interposed, for nothing less than the sacrifice of "the Son of God" could remedy the infinite evil which sin had entailed upon humanity. Christ, the Ransomer, was Divine—met and satisfied the infinite demands of inviolable justice—assumed our nature in a state of lowliness and humiliation, but free from every stain of sin, that He might obey the law which man had broken, and suffer and die "the just for the unjust, that He might," legally, "bring us to God" (ch. liii. 5, 10; Rom. viii. 3; 2 Cor. v. 21; Gal. iii. 13; 1 Pet. iii. 18, i. 18, 19). Our redemption by Christ secures the honour of the Divine character and law, &c. That would be no redemption which should cost the sacrifice of a single principle in the government of God, or make any compromise with the offenders. The justification of the penitent believer is perfectly consistent with the essential *righteousness* of God (Rom. iii. 24–26).

3. *Personal redemption is realised by penitent faith in the Saviour's atoning sacrifice* (Mark i. 15; John iii. 14–18, vi. 40, 47, xi. 25, 26; Acts xx. 20, 21). Thus, *repentance* and *faith* are the conditions of personal redemption; while it is *faith*—a faith that presupposes repentance—which is emphatically the means of connecting the sinner with Christ, so that he is admitted to the Divine favour, and receives the Holy Spirit to inspire filial confidence, and to renew his soul. What *repentance* implies. The nature of the *faith* which is emphatically the condition and means of personal redemption:—reliance, appropriation, trust, coming to Jesus, receiving of Christ, &c. (H. E. I. 1957–1968.) The *warrant* of faith—Christ's promises (Matt. xi. 28; John vi. 35, 37); the declared will and purpose of the Father, which assures the sinner that he cannot come to Christ in self-renunciation and be rejected (John vi. 38–40; Rom. viii. 32). Personal redemption is therefore perfectly *gratuitous*—"without money," without personal merit; and consequently is a manifestation of the abounding graciousness of God. St. Paul lays great stress on this (Rom. iii. 24, iv. 16, iii. 28). How excellent is this method of personal redemption, for it is adapted to all mankind (Rom. iii. 29, 30); it shuts out pride from man (Rom. v. 27); and it establishes the law (Rom. v. 21).

CONCLUSION: Gratefully avail yourselves of God's method of redemption offered to you in the Gospel, and constantly proclaimed to you by the ambassadors of Christ. It is suited to you. Let the redemption of your soul be your chief business—your "first" work. You may realise it *now*. The value of the present opportunity is unspeakably great. It may be *now* or *never* (Ps. xlix. 8).—*Alfred Tucker.*

I. THE LORD'S CHARGE AGAINST HIS PEOPLE. "Ye have sold yourselves for nought."

It teaches us, 1. That we are a sort of trading creatures; indigent and restless, wanting something we have not, and looking about to find it, that we may be happy. Buying and selling to get gain, that we may be happy. "For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought," &c. (Ps. iv. 6; James iv. 13.) 2. That which we part with for this supposed happiness is inestimably precious. Ourselves (ch. l. 1; Mark viii. 36, 37). 3. That the state into which we sell ourselves is deplorable. Like slaves. Joseph sold into Egypt (Ps. cv. 17, 18). The Jews sold themselves into Babylon. "Tied with the chain of our sins" (Ps. ix. 17; Isa. lii. 5; Rev. iii. 17). 4. That the enemy to whom we sell

ourselves is the devil (2 Tim. ii. 26; Luke ix. 21). Seen in Adam and Eve (Gen. iii. 1, &c.), Judas, Ananias. Jesus Christ was tempted to this (Matt. iv. 8, 9). 5. That we are volunteers in the sale of ourselves. "For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought," &c. Ahab sold himself to work wickedness (Hos. xiii. 9). The prodigal. Eve (Gen. iii. 6). 6. That in thus selling ourselves we rob and offend God. Because we are His creatures (Ps. c. 1, &c.) We waste His goods (Luke xvi. 1). 7. That what we get in thus selling ourselves is nothing. "For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought," &c. (ch. lv. 1, &c.; Eccles. ii. 11; Hos. viii. 7).

II. GOD'S GRACIOUS DECLARATION CONCERNING THEM.

"Ye shall be redeemed without money." Which teaches us, 1. *That God recovers His people to their forfeited privileges and enjoyments.* "*Redeemed*" (1 Sam. xxx. 18, 20). Such as (1.) acceptance with God. As to their persons and services (Eph. i. 6; Gen. iv. 4; Ezek. xx. 40, 41). (2.) Conformity to the glorious image of God (2 Cor. iii. 18; Eph. iv. 24; 1 John iii. 2). (3.) Fellowship with God. Adam had this (Gen. ii. 15, &c.) Believers have this (Eph. ii. 18; 1 John i. 1, 2). (4.) A system of providential blessings (Rom. viii. 28; 1 Cor. iii. 1, &c.)

2. *That this recovery is by redemption.* "For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought," &c. By price (Acts xx. 28). By power (Deut. vii. 8; Ps. cvi. 1, 7; Hos. xiii. 14).

3. *That this redemption is without money or merit on our part.* "For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought," &c. (ch. lv. 1, 2; Ezek. xx. 42, 44; Luke vii. 42).

CONCLUSION.—1. To the young, with whom Satan is beginning to tamper and bargain.

2. To the Antinomian, casting the blame of his captivity upon God. Adam and Eve (Gen. iii. 1, &c.)

3. To the captive—feeling his yoke, weakness and unworthiness (Jer. xxxi. 18, 20; Rom. vii. 1, &c.)

4. To the ransomed returning Christian (Ps. cxxvi. 1, &c.; Isa. xxxv. 10). —*New Pulpit Assistant*, pp. 226–230.

BLASPHEMY.

lii. 5. *My name continually every day is blasphemed.*

The proud and oppressive Babylonians delighted to add to the sorrows of the exiled Jews, by reproaching the name of their God, and by saying that He was unable to defend them and their city from ruin. This sin is awfully prevalent.

I. *What is meant by the "name" of the Lord?* His perfections, titles, word, &c.

II. *The various ways in which it is blasphemed.* 1. By denying His *existence* (Ps. x. 4, xiv. 1, liii. 1). 2. By denying His *sovereignty* (Job xxi. 14, 15; Exod. v. 2). 3. By denying His *truth* (Gen. iii. 4; Isa. xxxvi. 15; 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4). 4. By denying His *power* (2 Kings vii. 2; Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20; Isa. xxxvi. 15, 18–20, and 2 Kings xviii. 30, 32–35). 5. By denying His *omnipresence* and *omniscience* (Job xxii. 13, 14; Ps. x. 11, lxxiii. 11, xciv. 7; Isa. xxix. 15; Ezek. viii. 12).

6. By accusing Him of injustice (Jer. xii. 1; Ezek. xviii. 25, xxxiii. 17; Mal. ii. 17, iii. 15). 7. By murmuring against His dispensations (Isa. xlv. 9; Exod. xiv. 11, 12). 8. By false swearing, oaths, and curses, &c.

III. *The excuses usually made for it.* Ignorance, custom, example, surprise, passion, confirmation of what is said, meaning no harm, inconsistencies of professors, &c. (2 Sam. 12, 14; Ezek. xxxvi. 20; Rom. ii. 24; 2 Pet. ii. 2).

IV. *The evil consequences of it.* Destroys the little remains of the fear of God. Leads to the disobedience of all His commands. Sets a horrid example to others, especially to the young, &c.

V. *The powerful arguments against it.* "The Lord" is our glorious and lawful Sovereign, who sees and hears all things. He is a holy and jealous God, before whose bar we must appear. He is fully able to punish, and has assured us that He will (2 Kings xix. 22, 28; Isa. xxxvii. 23, 36–38; Ezek. xx. 27, 33, xxxv. 12–14).—*Alfred Tucker.*

Blasphemy. I. Its nature. II. Its guilt. III. Its awful prevalence. IV. Its certain punishment.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

The Gospel and its Publishers.

lii. 7. *How beautiful upon the mountains, &c.*

Whatever reference this passage might have to the deliverance of the people of God from the Chaldean bondage, it refers also and chiefly to the great and glorious Gospel of Christ (Rom. x. 13). It is in this application of it that it is now interesting and important.

I. A DELIGHTFUL REPRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

1. The Gospel is represented as "good tidings." This is literally the meaning of the word gospel. These good tidings centre in one glorious fact—the provision of a Saviour for a guilty world. Everything else is based on this fact. Everything connected with the gift of the Saviour forms matter for joy: the supreme dignity of His person, the completeness of His work, the glory of His doctrine, the efficacy of His death, and the exhaustless fulness of His blessings.

2. It publishes peace. Man united with the fallen apostate spirits in rebellion against God, &c.

3. It brings tidings of good. Not only is God at peace with the sinner, but He waits to bless him with all good. There is (1.) acceptance into God's favour. (2.) Divine adoption. (3.) The influences of the Spirit to illume, convince, guide, solace, meeten for heaven. (4.) The precious promises of the new covenant.

4. The Gospel publishes salvation. A salvation meeting the needs of the sinner.

5. The Gospel declares the reign of Jesus (Ps. ii. 6, 7, &c.)

II. AN INTERESTING DESCRIPTION OF THE MODE OF ITS PUBLICATION.

1. The messengers appointed to declare it. Jesus Himself went forth preaching the good tidings of His kingdom. Now the messengers are men, not angels. Men who have been called and qualified—sent of God. Men who have known and felt the power of the truths themselves.

2. The publication of this Gospel is to be free and extensive. They are to go forth prominently; to ascend the mountain tops, and there, before God, and angels, and men, they are to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. The message of grace is to be published throughout the world, and to every creature.

3. The publication of the Gospel is to be a source of joy and delight to perishing souls. By some it will be ridiculed. By others spurned. By others coolly and indifferently heard. But to thousands it shall be spirit and life, solace and bliss.

APPLICATION: 1. The subject should excite admiration and praise. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. But here is matchless love—unparalleled grace. 2. Have we experienced the saving power of the Gospel? Is it our boast, and joy, and song? 3. The infatuation of the rejectors of the good news (Heb. ii. 3, 1 Pet. iv. 17). 4. The duty of the Church to diffuse the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Its prayers, energies, and means, should all bear to this one great end, &c.—*The New Pulpit Assistant*, pp. 318–322.

I. The varied characteristics of the "good tidings" of Christianity—they are peace, salvation, the reign of God

II. The great function of the minister of the Gospel—is to bring these good tidings. III. The character in which he appears—"How beautiful," &c.; *i.e.*, how welcome they should be to us!—*John Cumming, D.D.: Occasional Discourses*, vol. i. p. 336.

The Ministry of the Gospel.

(*Ordination Sermon.*)

lii. 7. *How beautiful upon the mountains, &c.*

This exclamation would strike those who first read it more impressively than it strikes us. They would see the runner coming over the distant hills, bearing welcome news. They would hear the loud cry from the watchmen on the walls. They would see the people crowd to the gate to hear. The primary reference of the text is to the news of the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem, and of the restoration of the ruined city. But there is a secondary reference to gospel times. It is thus applied by the apostle (Rom. x. 15). We may thus apply it.

I. The ministry of the Gospel exists for the announcement of valuable intelligence. It brings good tidings. It is not a ministration of condemnation, but of salvation (2 Cor. iii.) It tells such things as these,

1. *That satisfaction has been made for human sin.* Man is sinful, guilty. The Lord Jesus Christ, by His death on the cross, has atoned for sin. Thus, in announcing this, the ministry of the gospel is "the ministry of reconciliation."

2. *That on the ground of that atonement salvation may be obtained by all that desire it.* The dark angel of sin and sorrow has not left the world. But there is pardon for the sinner, holiness for the depraved, comfort for the distressed, which will develop into heaven at last. It may be obtained by faith in Christ. The time when the gospel is preached is the tide of opportunity.

3. *That thus the Divine dominion over man is re-asserted and re-established.* "Thy God reigneth." He reigns through the bestowment of salvation. Jesus has been exalted to reign in His people's hearts, in the Church, in the world.

II. The ministry of the Gospel is a great and important office. The bearer of this intelligence, primarily referred to in our text, acquired importance both from his mission and his qualifications. He would require speed, interest in the message, fidelity. Thus the ministry is important. Remember,

1. *The end at which it aims.* The message, the sermon, is not the end but the means. It aims at the salvation of souls. Nothing less will content the true preacher than conversion, spiritual growth.

2. *The means which it employs.* The message itself. Attract attention to it by legitimate, not fantastic means. While the message cannot be changed, let it be presented in varied forms, to the young, to the aged, in public, in private.

3. *The qualifications which it demands.* Intelligent acquaintance with the message; a living personal interest in it; thoughtful carefulness as to the methods by which it may be made most interesting and acceptable; diligent and sedulous use of opportunities; earnest sympathy with Christ and immortal souls.

III. The ministry of the Gospel should be regarded with suitable respect and honour. The office, because of its nature; the man, on the supposition that he deserves it. The office cannot entitle the man to respect if he is not worthy of it. Qualification is the only title to office, and the only claim to respect in it. This being supposed, the prominent idea of the text is the man. This honour will comprise,

1. *Welcome.* The Galatians welcomed Paul. Jesus said, "Blessed

are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear." Welcome the ministry of the word by regular and constant attendance; by candid and respectful hearing, as distinguished from indifference, and from unkindly criticism; and by a kindly reception at the home.

2. *Love.* Cherish affection to the minister for his work's sake. Let him see it in the manner which reveals and perpetuates kindness. Sometimes commend his work.

3. *Maintenance* (1 Cor. ix.; Gal. vi. 6–8). Now what is maintenance? It is determined largely by position in society. If there is narrow-mindedness in relation to the minister's means of obtaining books, and unholding his influence in the locality where his lot is cast, the church suffers.

4. *Co-operation.* The primitive churches were active in many ministries. Every member of the church should do something for Christ. The work of extending the gospel is not the minister's business exclusively. The church should be a centre from which every one is working.

5. *Prayer.* This was the apostle's request (Ephes. vi. 19; 2 Thess. iii. 1). The work of the ministry is spiritual, and it requires spiritual influences. It needs the power of the Holy Ghost. Do you pray for it by praying for Him?

What is the practical effect of the preacher's work in those that receive the truth? Is it not that you bring forth fruits of holiness? See that such fruit is borne. Then you will in your turn proclaim the gospel to others, if not in words, by the influence of your lives (H. E. I. 2622, 2623).

But have you received the truth which has been heralded to you? Some of you are, perhaps, not yet saved. The preacher seeks your salvation. Oh, let this be his joy; not for his sake but for your own. Life is passing on. And the gospel alone can save.—*J. Rawlinson.*

I. *A representation of a true minister of Christ.* A messenger. 1. He receives his commission from God. 2. He is intrusted by Him. 3. He is qualified for his particular work.

II. *The subject of his message.* "Good tidings." 1. Peace. 2. Salvation from spiritual evil, and an introduction to spiritual good. 3. Dominion of Christ. He reigns in His providential and mediatorial kingdom.

III. *The dispositions with which he is received.* 1. With joy. 2. With admiration.

Improvement. 1. Gratitude for the gospel. 2. Attention to its tidings. 3. Obedience to its precepts.—*J. Hordle.*

The Great Revival.

lii. 10. *The Lord hath made bare His holy arm, &c.*

When the heroes of old prepared for the fight, they put on their armour; but when God prepares for battle, He makes bare His arm, that He may do His work in earnest and accomplish His purpose for the establishment of His Church. Leaving the figure, which is a very great one, I will remind you that its meaning is fully carried out whenever God is pleased to send a great revival of religion. (*a*)

I. The cause of a true revival. The mere worldly man does not understand a revival, he cannot make it out. Why is it, that a sudden fit of godliness, as he would call it, a kind of sacred epidemic, should seize upon a mass of people all at once? It frequently occurs in the absence of all great evangelists; it cannot be traced to any particular means. There have been no special agencies used in order to bring it about, and yet it has come, just like a heavenly hurricane sweeping everything before it. What then is the cause? It is caused by the Holy Spirit alone. The day of Pentecost. Do not imagine when you hear of a

sermon being made useful, that it was the sermon itself that did the work. But while this is the only actual cause, yet there are instrumental causes; and the main instrumental cause of a great revival must be bold, faithful, fearless preaching of the truth as it is in Jesus. But, added to this, there must be the earnest prayers of the Church. All in vain the most indefatigable ministry, unless the Church waters the seed sown with her abundant tears. Every revival has been commenced and attended by a large amount of prayer.

II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF A REVIVAL OF RELIGION.

1. Everything that our hearts could desire for the Church. The minister begins to be warmed. Directly after that, the revival begins to touch the people at large. A prayer meeting is summoned. The members of the Church grow solemn, more serious; family duties are better attended to, &c. And then comes the great result. There is an inquirers' meeting held; the good brother who presides over it is astonished, he never saw so many coming in his life before.

2. The reviyal of the Church then touches the rest of society. Men, who do not come forward and profess religion, are more punctual in attending the means of grace. Men that used to swear give it up, &c.

III. SOME CAUTIONS.

1. If in any revival you see any strange contortions of the body, &c., always distinguish between things that differ. The Holy Spirit's work is with the mind, not with the body. 2. Always distinguish between man and man in the work of revival. While during a revival of religion a very large number of people will be really converted, there will be a very considerable portion who will be merely excited with animal excitement, and whose conversion will not be genuine. Always expect that, and do not be surprised if you see it. 3. Do not relax the bonds of discipline.

CONCLUSION.—Stir you up to seek of God a great revival of religion throughout the length and breadth of this land. There are some of you who stand in the way—you are not consistent in your living; others that stand in the way of all progress; others are such sticklers for order, so given to everything that *has* been, that you do not care for any revival for fear we should hurt you. You who love Jesus with all your heart, and want to promote it, remember that men are dying around you by thousands. Did Christ give His whole life for their salvation, and will not you stir up your life to wrestle with God that His purpose may be accomplished on their behalf? As for you that fear not God, see how much ado we are making about you. Your souls are worth more than you think. Oh that you would believe in Christ to the salvation of your souls! —*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 185.

(a) The loose sleeve of the Arab shirt, as well as that of the outer garment, leaves the arm so completely free, that, in an instant, the left hand passing up the right arm, makes it bare; and this is done when a person—a soldier, for example, about to strike with the sword—intends to give his right arm full play. The image represents Jehovah as suddenly prepared to inflict some tremendous, yet righteous judgment, so effectual, that "all the ends of the world shall see the salvation of God."—*Jowett.*

THE SALVATION OF GOD UNIVERSALLY SEEN.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

lii. 10. *And all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.*

I. THE SALVATION WHICH IS TO BE REVEALED TO MANKIND.

1. Its *nature:* "the salvation of God." There is no doubt a primary reference to the delivery of the Jews from captivity; but its main and ultimate reference is to the salvation of men by Christ, for in the verses which immediately follow our text, as also in the next chapter, we have a picture of

the humiliation of the Saviour, and of its effects on mankind (see also Luke iii. 3–6). It is salvation from the curse of a violated law, and from the bondage of sin; and it comprehends admission into heaven at death, the resurrection of the body in glory, and its reunion with the spirit for ever. Such being the nature and vastness of this salvation, it surpasses the limits of human or angelic agency. It is necessarily the salvation of God.—Contemplate, then, 2. Its *divinity*. It is the product of His infinite wisdom, His almighty power, His unchanging faithfulness, His boundless love.

II. ITS UNIVERSAL MANIFESTATION.

1. *It was seen by "all the ends of the earth," in the ministry and triumphs of the early ages.* Whilst the comparative cessation of its early triumphs may be traced to the faithlessness of the Church, we may be assured that they have never been extinct. Throughout the darkest periods of the Church there were some who preached the good tidings. In every age the salvation of God has been seen, and its victories have probably been achieved to a far greater extent than has been known or recorded.

2. *In the future the prediction of our text shall be yet more gloriously fulfilled.* (1.) The Gospel shall be preached in every land. (2.) The salvation thus exhibited shall be everywhere triumphant. The reign of superstition and sin shall be brought to an end (H. E. I. 979, 1161–1168).

1. How much we owe to our Saviour for the provision of this salvation! 2. Ought it not to be our earnest desire to see this salvation for ourselves? 3. Ought we not to rejoice in prospect of the period when the prediction of our text shall be fulfilled? 4. Let us labour to accelerate the arrival of this period.—*John Johnson, M.A.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 389–418.

A DIVINE CALL TO FORSAKE THE WORLDLY LIFE.

lii. 11. *Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, &c.*

The prophet directly addresses those who were in exile in Babylon, and commands them to "depart" from it, when the opportunity, divinely promised, should occur. The urgency of the command, as indicated by its repetition, implies that there would be some delay on their part. Notwithstanding their early privations and sorrows, many of them seemed to prefer residence there, and were strongly indisposed to return. They knew the land of their fathers only by report. It was distant, involving a long and perilous journey across a pathless desert. Babylon was their native place, as well as their home, and the graves of their parents and kindred were there. Some of them had been advanced to official and illustrious positions, and many had property and friends there. Probably many of them had formed improper connections and attachments in that distant land, and they would be unwilling to relinquish them, to encounter the perils and trials incident to a return to the land of their fathers. Hence, the most urgent commands were addressed to them, and the strongest motives presented to induce them to leave the country of their exile. And after all, it is evident that but comparatively few of them were prevailed on to return to Zion. Apply this generally.

I. God calls men to forsake the worldly life. "Depart ye, . . . go ye out of the midst of her," &c. Many who attend our sanctuaries are "men of the world"—careless and indifferent about the claims of God and their immortal souls. Hardened by sin, and overcome by the world, they are deaf to entreaty and disobedient to warning, &c. The great majority of our fellow-countrymen "love the world and the things of the world"—manifest a stolid indifference to spiritual religion. This is the most painful aspect of our times. But God's call to men is—1. *Urgent.* 2. *Repeated.* 3. *Disinterested.*

II. Men are reluctant to obey this Divine call. See introduction. Through love of the world they are prejudiced against spiritual religion. This reluctance springs from many causes. 1. *Unbelief leads them to disregard all such calls.* "The Jews might doubt the power of God, the sincerity of the proclamation, and the benefits of returning to Jerusalem." To indolent and wicked men the commands of God seem unreasonable, the calls to duty prejudicial to selfish interests. Others may go to the celestial city, but they remain in the city of destruction.

2. "*Continuance in sin obliterates remembrance of spiritual good.* The Jews forgot their own land, and preferred the wealth of Babylon to Jerusalem, their chief joy. Worldly men are concerned for nothing beyond present enjoyments."

3. "*Present possessions are thought more certain than future good.* The present world to them is real. Power, position, and riches are seen and felt. But they disbelieve in future blessings." They walk by "sight," and for the sake of seen advantages, honours, and pleasures, they pursue courses of folly, sin, and shame, regardless of the consequences.

III. Sufficient motives to comply with this Divine call are presented to men. "God deals with them as reasonable and intelligent creatures. He does not constrain or force men out of the world."

1. "*Though God has punished, yet He loves men.*" The Jews had been dispersed far and wide; they had been punished with violence; yet God recalled them, and had mercy on them. God hates your sin, but loves *you;* and though He punishes your sin, still He loves *you.* His love to you is manifested in manifold ways.

2. "*Though men have disobeyed the call, they are not forsaken.*" God had called the Jews again and again, and though they had been ungrateful and disobedient, still God invites them tenderly and urgently. How often has God called *you!* How ungrateful and disobedient have you been! Still God invites you! But His longsuffering will have an end. Beware! Hear and obey!

3. "*Though invitations are given to men, yet disobedience will endanger their souls*" (Isa. lxv. 12–15; Luke xii. 47; 2 Thess. i. 7–9; 1 Pet. iv. 17). The danger is, 1. Real. 2. Imminent. Therefore (Gen. xix. 17; Jer. li. 45). —*Alfred Tucker.*

This is a direct address to the exiled Jews in their captivity. They were to separate themselves wholly from an idolatrous nation and keep themselves pure. The command pertains particularly to the priests and Levites, whose office it was to carry the vessels of the Lord (Num. i. 50, iv. 15). They were required to feel the importance of their office, and to be separate from all evil. But all Christians are spiritual priests (1 Pet. ii. 9; Rev. i. 5). "They are to bear the vessels of the Lord, are intrusted to keep the ordinances of God pure and entire; it is a good thing committed to them, and they ought to be clean, and so carry God's vessels, and keep themselves pure."—*M. Henry.*

I. God's people will have to do with the world as long as they are in it. The separation enjoined does not refer to civil affairs—buying, selling, &c., neither to existing relationships, &c. While in the world, the godly must live, &c.; and they are commanded not to be "slothful in business," &c. They are compelled to have intercourse with those whose ungodly deeds are grievous to them, like Lot (2 Pet. ii. 8). The believing wife must not leave her husband, &c. (H. E. I. 1035–1041, 5026–5043).

II. God's people should regard the world as the sphere of their influence and usefulness.—They are to be blessings to the world. They are its instructors, examples, ornaments, bulwarks, &c. Hence they must live and labour among worldly people, that they may be their benefactors, &c., and the instruments of their salvation

They are to shine in the world — to reprove its sinfulness by their holiness—to attract it by the beauty of their lives, &c.

III. God's people must be spiritually separated from the world. (a) Why? Because, 1. *The world is Satan's kingdom, and sinners are his subjects* (2 Cor. vi. 15; Eph. ii. 2; John xiv. 30). Saints must not needlessly associate with sinners, but show that Christ is their Master. "What concord (harmony) hath Christ with Belial?" None. "So is there none betwixt those who are Christ's disciples and Satan's servants. Discord arises from their fellowship, which is so painful that the believer is often tempted to lower his note in order to produce apparent harmony."

2. *The world is spiritually dark* (John iii. 19; Eph. v. 8, 11). "What communion hath light with darkness?" None. "If there be communion betwixt light and darkness, it is to the detriment of the light. How has the brightness of many a Christian life been dimmed by intimacy with the ungodly."

3. *The world is unbelieving* (Numb. xiv. 11). Worldly men trust in themselves and despise Christ. Sometimes their unbelief assumes the form of scepticism, which is not the result of careful inquiry, &c., but the slow result of indifference and prejudice, &c. (H. E. I. 369). "What part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

4. *The world is idolatrous.* They worship their pleasures, possessions, honours, &c. (Col. iii. 5; 1 John v. 2). "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Wherefore, come "ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean," &c. The separation is not to be comprised in a single act, but must be the habit of the life. It must be a *complete* withdrawal from all that is inimical to our spiritual interests, and contrary to the will of God.

IV. God's people have many motives urging them to this course of conduct. 1. *The requirement of God* (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18; Rom. xii. 2, &c.) Remember who it is that speaks. His eye is full upon you. What will you answer Him?

2. *The grand object and aim of the Gospel economy* (Gal. i. 4, &c.)

3. *The nature of their profession.* The vows of God are upon them; their baptismal engagements bind them to "renounce," &c.

4. *The glory of God and the interest of His cause.* How can we glorify God fully without entire separation from the world? Does not the worldliness of many professing Christians mar and sully the cause and honour of our Redeemer?

V. God's people will realise the most blessed results from such a separation. 1. *Deliverance from the terrible consequences of worldliness.* Many have been ruined by it, as Sampson, Lot, Solomon, Demas, &c. (1 Cor. xi. 32). Worldliness separates us from fellowship with God, and finally plunges us into perdition.

2. *The abiding presence of God* (2 Cor. vi. 16; Col. iii. 16; 2 Tim. i. 14).

3. *An interest in God and all that He has promised.* "I will be their God" —that is, everything that heart can desire (2 Cor. vi. 16).

4. *Ever-increasing usefulness.* "Other things being equal, you will be useful in proportion as you are holy." (H. E. I. 1089–1095.)

5. *A more glorious reward in the world to come* (P. D. 722, 1752).—*Alfred Tucker.*

(a) "Touch no unclean thing"—connected with the idolatries and defilements of Babylon; "go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean" —by separating yourselves wholly from Babylonian idolatries, "that bear the vessels of the LORD." "The Apostle Paul has applied this to Christians, and uses it as expressing the obligation to come out from the world, and to be separate from all its influences (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18). Babylon is regarded by the apostle as not an inapt emblem of the world, and the command to come out from her as not an improper expression of the obligation of the friends of the Redeemer to be separate from all that is evil."—(*Barnes.*) "Go ye out of the midst of her." Practically, this means "come out from the world—not the material world, of course, nor the philosophic world, nor the commercial world; but come out from the spirit, the principles, the motives that govern worldly men." "Touch no unclean thing" belonging to them—have nothing to do with

sin in any of its forms or manifestations. "Let your intercourse with them be like that of angels, who, when sent from heaven, had no sooner discharged their errand than they flew back again with rapid wing to the pure heavens."

For introductory material, see other outlines on this text.

A summons to a very important duty, which, if more generally regarded, would greatly tend to the purity and prosperity of the Church, &c. One of the greatest evils of our times, with which the Church has to struggle, is conformity to the world, &c. "From worldliness, that mildew of churches, good Lord, deliver us."

I. There is great danger lest we should damage our Christian life by conformity to the lower life of the world around. Such conformity may be—

1. *Involuntary.* "We have simply to cease to resist the current, and we shall drift with it. Left to themselves, things tend to equilibrium and assimilation."

2. *Unconscious*, because so slow and gradual. "As the ship is moved by the tide without the motion being perceived, as old age creeps on a man before he is aware of it; so silently and stealthily the spirit of the world infuses itself into the unwatchful Christian."

3. *It is easily glided into in times of prosperity.* (α) As you love your souls, beware of the world; it has slain its thousands and ten thousands. What ruined Lot's wife, Achan, Haman, Judas, Simon Magus, Demas? The world! (Mark viii. 36.)

II. Our security against this danger lies in spiritual separation from it (H. E. I. 5026–5061).

1. "It is vain to *flee* from the world, for we may carry the world in our hearts to the wilderness; and it is wrong, for we have a distinct mission to the world, and in fulfilling this mission must learn how to use the things of the world without abusing them." If you would overcome the world, be assured that you must remain in it, but not be *of* it; you must not shrink from its responsibilities to avoid its perils. You must stand where God in His providence has placed you — humble in prosperity, trustful in adversity, Christian in all.

2. "It is equally vain simply *to oppose* the world. Unless we are ourselves different in spirit from the world, the opposition will be a futile hypocrisy."

3. It is only by *moral* separation from it that we can escape this danger. (β)

III. We are commanded thus to separate ourselves from the world. "Go ye out of the midst of her" (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18; Rom. xii. 2, &c.) 1. The Divine command implies *urgency.* (See previous outline.) 2. The Divine command implies *strenuous effort.* (See vol. i. p. 37.) 3. The *necessity* for such a command is obvious when we consider—(1.) The constant presence of the world. (2.) The ties which bind us to the world. (3.) The tendency of the human heart.

IV. There are many motives which concur in urging obedience to this command.

1. *The will of our Heavenly Father* (1 Thess. iv. 3). He *requires* our "sanctification"—separation from all sin, &c.

2. *The example and mission of Christ.* "He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." In all His transactions, in all His intercourse with others, He preserved Himself unspotted (1 John ii. 6). "He has left us an example," &c. The design of Christ in dying for us—the one great moral result for which He "gave Himself for us," was that He might rescue us — select and separate us — "from this present evil world"—the system or course of the present age, as impregnated with spiritual evil, &c. (Gal. i. 4, &c.) The grand moral result contemplated was our deliverance from *worldliness.*

3. *The principles you profess.*

4. *The duty you owe to the Church and to the world.* By nonconformity to the world you strengthen the cause of truth and righteousness, cause the

friends of Zion to rejoice, and manifest to the world the sincerity of your profession, &c.

5. *The duty you owe to yourself.* Self-love prohibits conformity to the world, for thereby you take the most direct steps to plunge yourself into that condemnation which will be the portion of the ungodly. But by obedience to this injunction you promote your own holiness, happiness, usefulness, &c.

CONCLUSION.—Is your separation from the world boldly and clearly defined? If not, in so far as *you* are concerned, Christ has died in vain. "Come out from the world"! "Go ye out of the midst of her"! Yield yourself to Jesus, that He may accomplish this great work in you. Give Him your heart and He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness in heart and habits and life. Let not the charge of singularity frighten you from duty. Let your nonconformity to the world be manifest and thorough.—*Alfred Tucker.*

(α) When the world persecutes the Church, Christians are in less danger of going over to the camp of the enemy than when it flatters and even imitates the Church, and the temptation is to meet compliance with compliance. Thus the very amelioration of the world under Christian influences may make it more dangerous by rendering it less repulsive, and by hiding its grosser evils under a decorous cloak. In Brazil there grows a common plant, which forest-dwellers call the *matador*, or "murderer." Its slender stem creeps at first along the ground; but no sooner does it meet a vigorous tree, than, with clinging grasp, it cleaves to it, and climbs it, and as it climbs, keeps at short intervals sending out arm-like tendrils that embrace the tree. As the murderer ascends, these ligatures grow larger and clasp tighter. Up, up it climbs a hundred feet, nay, two hundred if need be, until the last loftiest spire is gained and fettered. Then, as if in triumph, the parasite shoots a large flowery head above the strangled summit, and thence, from the dead tree's crown, scatters its seed—the work of death. Even thus worldliness has strangled more churches than ever persecution broke.—*Coley.*

(β) "People ask foolishly, 'Where shall we draw the line?' Some draw it at the theatre, some at the concert, some at all amusements. Unworldliness does not consist in the drawing of any line, however strict and vigorous. It consists in the change of our own hearts into an unworldly spiritual condition. And when this change is effected we shall voluntarily loathe and hate all debased things, and they will no longer have any power to allure us. There will then be no need to 'draw a line,' for there will be no inclination to approach as near as possible to forbidden ground." Faith realises *Christ's* Kingship, and its subjects transfer their allegiance to Him, acknowledging Him to be their Master and Lord, and disclaiming all others. Faith recognises the rightful authority of the whole current of His commands, which run against the love of the world, and renders a willing obedience as the surest evidence of sincerity. A new world has opened to their view, that by an irresistible attraction draws away their hearts from "this present evil world." The love of Christ expels the love of the world. Faith conquers it by connecting us with the grace and victory of Christ, and by keeping in view the distinguished and everlasting rewards of the future life.—*Tucker.*

HOLINESS.

lii. 11. *Touch no unclean thing, &c.*

The great Head of the Church speaks to His people now, in the voice of His word and by the voice of His providence, as He has scarcely ever spoken before. And for good reasons. The world is perishing all around us. The Church in many places is asleep in its worldliness, fashions, and follies, &c. But the fields around us are whitening to the harvest. The doors are opening on every hand, under the providence of God. We have no confidence in the permanent success of any reformatory movements, unless they are under the leadership and influence of a living Christianity and a living Church (Ps. li.; Isa. vi.) It was only when the coronals of fire were on the brow of the early Church that every one of its members became a living witness, testifying of "Jesus and the resurrection."

I. Holiness furnishes both the disposition and desire to work for the Lord. We cannot be co-workers with God, unless we are one in sympathy, spirit, and purpose with Him. Just in proportion as the spirit of holiness sways the soul will be this disposition and this purpose. The very first en-

trance of the renewing Spirit into the soul of the believer begets this desire and purpose; and how much more will they control and impel it when He has taken full possession of all its powers! The believer will be willing to do anything for Jesus when he has consecrated all to Him. Sacrifices will be regarded as nothing for the sake of Him who sacrificed all for us.

II. The spirit of holiness also furnishes the help needed for such work. Nothing but this will bear the soul along for weeks, months, and years in this work. There are difficulties, discouragements, and sometimes fearful obstructions in the way of those who undertake these services. No one, unaided by Divine grace, would enter upon such a work, and if he did he would speedily abandon it in either disgust or despair. But the same Spirit who gives the disposition and desire to work for God, also gives the help to do that work (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10). This is heroic; it is sublime. And it is this endowment of power, the power which holiness brings with it to the soul, which the Church, in its ministry and membership, now needs to fit it for its high and holy mission (H. E. I. 2827).

III. Holiness furnishes the very best and the only absolutely necessary qualifications for this work. We do not refer so much to intellectual qualifications; they are to be secured in other ways. But holiness will clarify the intellect, enlarge the heart, and tip and touch the tongue with an unaccountable eloquence, far beyond any natural gifts which the witness for Christ may possess. This is the one indispensable requisite for this work. Learning is, indeed, exceedingly desirable; but all may be possessed, while the one who has it is unfitted for the Master's service, and powerless for the salvation of immortal beings. If he have this power, this grace, however rude he may be in speech, or inelegant in manners, or unacquainted with the mighty tomes which contain the facts of science or the lore of the ages, however unheralded he may be by name or fame, he will work wonders in the name of the Lord. The instances are multiplied, &c. Certainly, the more holy any one is, the more closely he will endeavour to imitate his Master and Lord, who "went about doing good." Oh, it is not a negative holiness which the world wants, but a positive, earnest, self-sacrificing, all-consuming holiness, which will expend itself in labours for the good of others (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). If any one should think that he has attained to holiness, or profess to enjoy this grace, and has not this disposition or desire to work for Jesus, it is clearly evident that he is deceived, and all his professions are worse than vain.

IV. The spirit of holiness, dwelling in the human soul, will lead it to work for Christ, without selfishness, false ambition, struggle for honour, position, or emolument: and without envy or jealousy of the good, or the rights and privileges of others. (α) —*Lewis R. Dunn: Holiness to the Lord*, pp. 77–86.

(α) There is little time for looking after souls where self is dominant. There is little left for benefactions to the poor, the suffering, the distressed, for the cause of God and of humanity, where the loud and ever-increasing clamours for self-gratification demand all, and often more than all, we may possess. And there is but little satisfaction or comfort in the service of Christ which is so marred and blurred and clouded with false ambitions, envies, and jealousies. But this pure spirit of holiness not only expurgates sin, but also self, with all its train of evils and follies. And where these have held undisputed sway, now Jesus reigns alone. And how easy, how pleasant, to work for Him when His love inspires our breast! Love supreme, love to God, begets in us love for our neighbour, and bears us onward cheerfully, in all toils and sacrifices, to bless and save him. What power cannot accomplish, what wealth cannot buy, love can do. And it is the religion of love which is to conquer this world. Truly did the eloquent Castelar say recently in the Spanish Cortes, "Might is the religion of power; but the religion of love is almighty."—*Dunn.*

We have now everything else. In a measure we have this. But we have it not in the degree of fulness and power which is needed to enable us

to meet our vast responsibilities and move our ponderous machinery. And this is what is needed to meet the wants of the great beating, surging heart of the world. This is to be its great centre of attraction. All else will be of no avail (H. E. I. 2813–2866).

I. Holiness is wanted in the ministry. The priests of Zion, to be efficient, must be "clothed with righteousness as with a garment." They must be anointed and endowed with the "spirit of holiness." It was for them primarily that the Saviour prayed in His intercessory prayer: "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth." There is nothing ministers need so much as holiness. How great is the need, even now, that the entire ministry of the Church should be clad in the shining vestments of holiness! What a spirit of consecration would they then exhibit! What zeal, what self-sacrifice, what sympathy, what power would they possess! It is true that this might create some opposition from worldly-minded, formal, or backslidden professors of religion; but this would not hinder the progress of the work of God. Such a mighty momentum would be given to the cause of the Redeemer, that all barriers would sooner or later be swept out of the way, and the Gospel would not only "run," but it would be "glorified." And what an impulse would this give to our missionary work!

II. Holiness is wanted in the Church. The history of the Church clearly demonstrates the fact that, as spiritual vitality and power have declined, there has been an effort to substitute for them external forms and multiplied machinery. And generally, where there has been the least of these spiritual elements, there has been the greatest amount of the material. Now the same absurd tendencies are developing themselves. Much is said nowadays about the barrenness of Protestant worship; it is the barrenest thing in the world, without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Romanism, the Greek Church, and the High Church of England and America, have a something which seems in a measure to compensate them for their loss or lack of spiritual vitality. As they have not "the beauty of the Lord upon them," they have invented a sort of beauty which attracts the eye and ravishes the senses. As they have ceased to be spiritual, they have become simply sensuous. But Protestantism has really provided for nothing of this kind. Without holiness, our churches are nothing but a shell. But where this is, there "the tabernacle of God is with men" (Isa. iv. 5). And this is all the glory and defence which we need. There must be a return to vital godliness, with all its blessed and heavenly influences, speedily, or else there will follow on rapidly decline, decay, and death.

III. It is holiness which is wanted to bring in the glories of the millennial era, and which will be universal in that era. The ministry and the Church thus consecrated, bearing on every forehead and every breast, on every heart and every life, "Holiness unto the Lord," would soon bring in the brightest glories foretold on the glowing pages of Isaiah (H. E. I. 1089–1093, 1169).—*Lewis R. Dunn*, pp. 109–117.

The Vanguard and Rereward of the Church.

lii. 12. *For ye shall not go out with haste, &c.*

God's salvation is a great salvation, because of its Divine origin, and because of the original dignity of man. It is not a rescue simply, but a deliverance; not an escape, but a victory; sin is not eluded, but destroyed. This has been the grand characteristic of all God's deliverances.

I. The essentially symbolic character of the captivities and deliverances of the Jewish people.

The history of Israel is the Divine key to the history of man. The Egyptian bondage has the broadest meaning. Of Christ, of you, of each one, the words are true: "Out of

Egypt have I called my son." There were two great captivities of Israel; they were born in one; the other they earned by sin. These represent our natural bondage, and the self-earned serfdom of the soul. Therefore also two deliverances. There is one Deliverer, and one deliverance from both captivities. In each case the method of His deliverance was the same,—a glorious manifestation of the might of the redeeming arm of God. At first sight, there is a contrast as well as a likeness. One might feel inclined to say that the Exodus was a flight. This contrast was, no doubt, before Isaiah's mind (Deut. xvi. 3; Exod. xii. 31–39). From Babylon they went forth in orderly array, with the king's good-will, and by his royal command (Ezra i.) But under the surface the grand features are identical; in neither case did they steal away; they obeyed Jehovah's will; the angel of His presence guided them, and His judgments were on all who sought to resist their departure. Here it was that Isaiah saw and asserted the likeness, "Jehovah shall go before you," &c. (Exod. xiii. 21, 22, xiv. 19, 20).

II. THE GREAT DELIVERANCE WHICH IS FREELY OFFERED IN THE GOSPEL.

1. The reason of our protracted discipline. God will not have us "*go out with haste, nor go forth by flight.*" Many Christians can look back to some period, and say, "Would God that I had then been taken home!" Others in the hour of trial say, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." Not by the short, straight way, but by the long, weary, desert path, God led His pilgrims; a band of trained veterans, they entered at length into Canaan. It is this experience which, at sore cost of pain, God is laying up within us; this patient waiting is a store of power and wisdom, the worth of which will only be manifested as we press the borders of Canaan.

2. "*The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward.*" The Lord has gone before us; it is this which makes our progress a triumph; it is in Him we find the way to the conqueror's rest. (1.) He has gone before us in bearing to the uttermost the penalty of sin. (2.) He has gone before us in breaking the power of evil (John xiv. 27, xvi. 33). You have but to strive with a beaten foeman. (3.) He has gone before us in the way of the wilderness, through life's protracted discipline, to glory (Heb. v. 7–9). Sorrow is transfigured by the resurrection and glorification of Christ; and He has gone "to prepare a place for you."

"And the God of Israel shall be your rereward;" He shall gather up the stragglers of the host (ch. xl. 10, 11); the weak ones shall not be down-trodden, nor the halting left hopelessly in the rear (chaps. xli. 10, xliii. 1–7). The cause is God's, the power His, and His shall be the glory of the everlasting victory.—*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A.: Sermons*, pp. 419–427.

The Church of Christ is continually represented under the figure of an army; yet its Captain is the Prince of Peace; its object is the establishment of peace, and its soldiers are men of a peaceful disposition. The spirit of war is at the extremely opposite point to the spirit of the Gospel. Nevertheless, the Church on earth has, and until the second advent must be, the Church militant, the Church armed, warring, conquering. It is in the very order of things that so it must be. Truth could not be truth in this world if it were not a warring thing, and we should at once suspect that it were not true if error were friends with it. It is but a rule of nature that holiness must be at enmity with sin. And every child of God proveth by experience that this is the land of war. Now, how comforting is this text to the believer who recognises himself as a soldier, and the whole Church as an army!

I. The whole Church of God may trust in this great twofold promise. 1. *Jehovah will go before you.* Has He not gone before His Church in act and

deed? Perilous has been the journey of the Church from the day when first it left Paradise even until now. I see the Church going out from Ur of the Chaldees; afterwards going down to the land of the cruel Pharaohs. But now the Church has to come up out of Egypt, and God goes before her still. But why need I go through all the pages of the history of the Church of God in the days of the old dispensation? Hath it not been true from the days of John the Baptist until now? If you read the history of the Church, you will be compelled to confess that whenever she went forward she could discern the footsteps of Jehovah leading the way.

2. "*The God of Israel will be your rereward.*" The original Hebrew is, "God of Israel shall gather you up." Armies in the time of war diminish by reason of stragglers, some of whom desert, and others of whom are overcome by fatigue; but the army of God is gathered up; none desert from it if they be real soldiers of the cross, and none drop down upon the road. The Church of Christ has been frequently attacked in the rear. It often happens that the enemy, tired of opposing the onward march by open persecution, attempt to malign the Church concerning something that has either been taught, or revealed, or done in past ages. Now the God of Israel is our rereward. I am never at trouble about the attacks of infidels or heretics, however vigorously they may assault the doctrines of the Gospel. If they must attack the rear, let them fight with Jehovah Himself. Perhaps the later trials of the Church may represent the rereward. It always has been so with the Church—a time of prosperity and then a period of persecution. Can you now conceive the last great day when Jehovah the rereward will gather up His people?

II. The individual believer should lay hold upon this great twofold promise. We are now come to the last Sabbath of the year. Two troubles present themselves, the *future* and the *past*. We shall soon launch into another year, and hitherto we have found our years years of trouble, &c. Perhaps we are trembling to go forward. Foreseeing trouble, we know not how we shall be able to endure to the end, &c. Let this sweet morsel now cheer you. The Lord Jehovah will go before you. He has gone before you already. Your future path has all been marked out,—1. *In the great decrees of His predestination.* Remember, you are not a child of chance. If you were, you might indeed fear.

2. *In the actual preparations of His providence.* God always makes a providence beforehand, ready for His people when they get to the place. We do not know how the future lies in the bowels of the past, and how *what is to be* is the child of *that which is*. As all men spring from their progenitors, so the providence of to-day springs from the providence of a hundred years past. The events of next year have been forestalled by God in what He has done this year and years before. I am certain of this, that on the road I am to travel during the next year, everything is ready for me. You are not going through a land that God has not prepared for you.

3. *In the experience of Christ.* As to our future troubles for next year, and the remnant of our days, Jesus Christ has borne them all before. He has conquered every foe.

Now I hear one say, "The future seldom troubles me; it is *the past*—what I have done and what I have not done; how I have sinned, and how I have not served my Master as I ought, &c. Oh! it is the rereward that is most unsafe. I dread most the sins of the past." "The God of Israel shall be your rereward." Notice the different titles. The first is "*The Lord*," or properly, JEHOVAH—JEHOVAH will go before you. That is the I AM, full of omniscience and omnipotence. The second title is "*the God of Israel*," that is to say, the God of the Covenant. We want the God of the Covenant behind, because it is not in the capacity of the I AM, the Omnipotent, that we

require Him to pardon sin, to accept our person, to blot out the past, and to remove iniquity by the blood of Christ. Now let me always think that I have God behind me as well as before me, let not the memories of the past, though they cause me grief, cause me despair.

CONCLUSION.—Are there any here to-day whose hearts God hath touched, who desire to join this great army? The past shall all be blotted out; God shall be thy rereward. And as for the future, thou chief of sinners, if now thou enlistest into the army of Christ by faith, thou shalt find the future shall be strewn with the gold of God's grace, and the silver of His tempora. mercies; thou shalt have enough and to spare from this day forth even to the end, and at the last thou shalt be gathered in by the great arms of God, that constitute the rear-guard of His heavenly army.—*C. H. Spurgeon: The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 230.

THE PREDICTED CHARACTER AND TRIUMPH OF CHRIST.

lii. 13–15. *Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, &c.*

Our text is a distinct subject from that discussed in the previous parts of the chapter, and evidently ought to have formed a part of chapter liii. It is most clearly a prophecy concerning the Messiah. It relates both to His official character, sufferings, exaltation, and conquests; and, as such, is replete with deeply interesting matter for our profitable meditation.

I. THE OFFICE OF CHRIST. God's servant. "My servant" (ch. xlii. 1). Christ, in His mediatorial character, was God's servant, while in His essential glory He was God blessed for evermore (see pp. 80–92). *Hearken to His own declarations* (Matt. xx. 28; John ix. 4, v. 30). His feeling at the beginning of life (Luke ii. 49). His declarations at its end (John xvii. 4). He ever recognised Himself as God's servant.

Observe how he discharged the office of servant. (1.) His *fidelity.* He was faithful in all things—never omitted one of the requirements of His Father; did all His will, and that perfectly. (2.) His *zeal.* His Father's honour and glory ever melted His ardent soul. This feeling consumed His sacred spirit. How it burst forth in the Temple (John ii. 11–17). (3.) His *perseverance.* He held on His course with undeviating constancy; never turned aside; was faithful unto death. (4.) The text refers to His *prudence.* The word in the margin is "prosper," but our translation would lead us to view one striking feature in His office—the wisdom which distinguished His course. This shone forth as the light of the sun at noonday. In His discourses to His disciples, in His replies to His enemies, "never man spake like this man." Never could His foe entangle Him, &c. Infallibility marked all He said and did.

II. HIS SUFFERINGS. "As many were astonished." Astonishing—that a personage so illustrious should be so abased (Ps. xxii. 6; Isa. liii. 3, 4). How bitterly was He calumniated! How maliciously He was persecuted!

III. HIS EXALTATION. "He shall be exalted," &c. Christ was exalted, 1. In His resurrection from the dead. 2. By His elevation to the right hand of the throne of God.

IV. HIS GLORIFICATION. "He shall be extolled." That is, praised, His character celebrated, &c. Angels extolled Him as their Lord, heralded Him back again to His kingdom and glory (Ps. xxiv. 7–10). John heard all the celestial hosts of heaven extolling Him in their anthems of praise (Rev. v. 11–14). His ministering servants and people extol Him on earth. He shall be extolled by His redeemed saints for ever.

V. HIS GRACIOUS CONQUESTS.

1. "*He shall sprinkle,*" *&c.* He does so. (1.) By His doctrines. His blessed

word falls as the rain, distils as the dew, &c. (2.) By His blood. When these doctrines are received, then man partakes of the merits of His death, and the cleansing virtues of His blood. The blood of Christ is called the blood of sprinkling. (3.) By His spiritual blessings. The outpouring of His Holy Spirit, and the rich communications of His mercy and love.

2. *He shall silence the opposition of kings.* These shall oppose the Gospel, and employ worldly power and authority against it. But He shall overturn, &c. (Ps. ii. 12, lxxii. 10).

3. *His achievements shall be unprecedented and wonderful.* Two things shall particularly astonish. (1.) The simplicity of His means. Not by carnal weapons, not by human power, not by armies, &c., nor by science, but by the word of grace, and the messengers of salvation (1 Cor. i. 21). (2.) The completeness of the results. Effective, deep, and universal changes. Men renovated—society altered. Ignorance banished—crime annihilated—misery extinguished. Purity, joy, and bliss diffused. The days of heaven upon earth.

APPLICATION. 1. Are we the friends or enemies of the Saviour? Do we despise, reject, deride, reproach, &c., or do we hail, receive, and delight in Him? All men act now as His friends or foes. 2. Has He sprinkled your hearts with the blessings of His grace —His word—His blood—Spirit? 3. Are you aiding Christ in His triumphal career? Accelerating the conversion of the world? The soldiers of His cross? 4. What bright visions are yet to distinguish the cause of the Saviour! "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel," &c.—*The Pulpit Encyclopædia:* vol. i. pp. 156–160.

I. *The work of Christ on earth, as this prophecy presents it.* 1. He is called the "Servant of the Lord." 2. He is a servant "dealing prudently." 3. Yet was His visage marred more than any man.

II. *The glory of Christ upon His mediatorial throne.* 1. He shall be exalted. This relates to His authority and power. 2. He shall be extolled. 3. He shall be very high (Phil. ii. 9–11).

III. *The works of mercy which the Saviour is accomplishing in His exalted state.* 1. He sets forth His Gospel according to His promise. 2. He shall sprinkle many nations. This denotes the priestly office of Christ. The kings shall shut their mouths at Him, &c.—*J. Stratten: The Pulpit,* vol. iii. pp. 117–124.

Modern Jewish writers refuse to see the Messiah in this passage, but their predecessors were not so blind. The Targum and the ancient Rabbins interpreted it of the Messiah, and indeed all attempts to explain it apart from Him are palpable failures. Christian commentators in all ages have seen the Lord Jesus here.

I. THE CHARACTER OF OUR LORD'S DEALINGS. He is called in the text, "*My servant,*" a title as honourable as it is condescending. Jesus has deigned to become the great servant of God under the present economy; He conducts the affairs of the household of God, and it is said that *He deals prudently.* He who took upon Him the form of a servant acts as a wise servant in everything. This prudence was manifest in the days of His flesh, from His childhood among the doctors in the Temple on to His confession before Pontius Pilate. Our Lord was enthusiastic (John ii. 17); but that enthusiasm never carried Him into rashness; He was as wise and prudent as the most cool-hearted calculator could have been. He was full of love, and that love made Him frank and open-hearted; but for all that He "committed Himself unto no man, for He knew what was in man." Too many who aspire to be leaders of the people study policy, craft, and diplomacy. The Friend of sinners had not a fraction of that thing about Him; and yet you see His wisdom when He baffles His adversaries; and when He deals with His friends (John xvi. 12).

He who on earth became obedient unto death has now gone *into His glory*, but He is still over the house of God, conducting its affairs. *He deals prudently still.* Our fears lead us to judge that the affairs of Christ's kingdom are going amiss, but we may rest assured that all is well. He has ultimate designs which are not apparent upon the surface, and these He never fails to accomplish.

Another translation of the passage is, "my servant shall have prosperous success." Let us append that meaning to the other. *Prosperity will grow out of our Lord's prudent dealings.* The pleasure of the Lord prospers in the hands of Jesus. The Gospel will prosper in the thing whereto God has sent it. All along the line the Captain of our salvation will be victorious, and in every point and detail of the entire business the will of the Lord shall be done, and all heaven and earth shall be filled with praise as they see that it is so.

In consequence of this, the Lord shall be exalted and extolled. How well He deserves to be exalted and extolled for His matchless prudence! The plans which the Lord has adopted are surely working out the growth of His kingdom, and will certainly result in bringing to the front His name, and person, and teaching. The star of Jesus rises higher every hour. He was despised and rejected of men, but now tens of thousands adore Him; and to Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

II. THE STUMBLING-BLOCK IN THE WAY OF OUR LORD. It is His cross, which to Jew and Greek is ever a hindrance. As if the prophet saw Him in vision, he cries out, "As many were astonished at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." When He was here, His personal position and condition and appearance were very much against the spread of His kingdom. He was the son of a carpenter, He wore the smock-frock of a peasant, He associated with publicans and sinners. Therefore the Jews rejected the meek and lowly prince of the house of David, and alas! they persist in their rejection of His claims.

To-day He has risen from the grave and gone into His glory, but the offence of the cross has not ceased, for upon His Gospel there remains the image of His marred visage, and therefore men despise it. The preaching of the cross is foolishness to many. Men will tell you they could believe Christianity, if it were not for the atonement. Here stands the head and front of the difficulty—the cross, which is the soul of Christianity, is also its stumbling-block. (α)

The practical part of the Gospel is equally a stumbling-block to ungodly men, for when men inquire what they must do to be saved, they are told that they must receive the Gospel as little children, that they must repent of sin, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Very humbling precepts for human self-sufficiency! "Be kindly affectioned one to another," "forgiving one another and forbearing one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you;" to the world which loves conquerors, and blasts of trumpets, and chaplets of laurel, this kind of teaching has a marred visage, and an uncomely form.

What seems even more humbling, the Lord sends this Gospel among us by men who are neither great nor noble, nor even among the wise of this world. Very simple is what they say: "Believe and live; Christ in your stead suffered for you, trust Him;" they say this and little more. Is not this the fool's gospel? Is it not worthy to be called the foolishness of preaching? Men do not like this, it is an offence to their dignity. They would hear Cæsar if he would officiate in his purple, but they cannot endure Peter preaching in his fisherman's coat.

Worse still, the people who become converted and follow the Saviour are generally of the poorer sort, and lightly esteemed. "Have any of the rulers believed?" is still the question. (β)

III. THE CERTAINTY OF THE SPREAD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM As His face

was marred, so surely "shall He sprinkle many nations." This sprinkling we must interpret according to the Mosaic ceremonies, and you know there was a sprinkling with blood, to set forth pardon of sin, and a sprinkling with water to set forth purification from the power of sin. Jesus Christ, with

> "The water and the blood
> From His riven side which flowed,"

has sprinkled not only men but many nations, and the day will come when all nations shall feel the blessed drops which are scattered from His hands, and know them to be "of sin the double cure," cleansing transgressors both from its guilt and power.

The text claims for Christ that the influence of His grace and the power of His work shall be extended over many nations, and shall have power, not over the common people only, but over their rulers and leaders. "The kings shall shut their mouths at Him;" they shall have no word to say against Him; they shall be so subdued by the majesty of His power that they shall silently pay Him reverence, and prostrate themselves before His throne. The day will come when the mightiest prince shall count it his highest honour to have his name enrolled as a member of the Church of Christ (Ps. lxxii. 11; Jer. xxxi. 34).

IV. THE MANNER OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THIS PROPHECY. How will it come to pass? Will there be a new machinery? Will the world be converted, and the kings be made to shut their mouths by some new mode of operation? No, the way which has been from the beginning of the dispensation will last to its close. It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. To conceive that our Lord will end the present mode of warfare, as though it were admitted that the evil could not be conquered by the use of that instrumentality, is to my mind to do Him great dishonour. To me it is plain that, as He has chosen to magnify His power by using feeble instruments, He will continue to do so till the victory is won.

According to this passage, these kings and nations are first of all to hear. "Faith cometh by hearing." Well, brethren, if they are to hear, we must preach and teach, so that our clear line of duty is to go on spreading the Gospel.

These people appear not only to have heard, but to have *seen*. "That which had not been told them shall they see." This seeing is not with their bodily eyes, but by the perceptions of their minds. Faith comes by the soul perceiving what the Gospel means. We cannot believe in that which we do not perceive. Therefore we must go on telling people the Gospel till they see what the Gospel is.

After they had seen, they *considered*. "That which they had not heard shall they consider." This is how men are saved: they hear the Gospel, they catch the meaning of it, and then they consider it. Let us pray that God would set unconverted people considering. If we can but get them to think, we have great hopes of them. (See vol. i. pp. 7–12.)

It is clear that those people, when they had seen and considered silently, accepted the Lord as their Lord, for they shut their mouths at Him; they ceased from all opposition; they quietly resigned their wills, and paid allegiance to the great King of kings. Now then, let us spread abroad the Saviour's blessed name, for He is the world's only hope. The cross is the banner of our victory. God help us to look to it ourselves, and then to hold it up before the eyes of others, till our Lord shall come upon His throne.—*C. H. Spurgeon The Metropolitan Pulpit*, No. 1231.

(a) If any here are offended with Christ because of His cross, I beg them to dismiss the prejudice. Should it lead any man to doubt the Saviour, or withhold his heart from Him because He comes with a visage marred with sorrow? If He came to teach us to be unhappy, and to prescribe to us rules for increasing misery, we might be excused if we shunned His teaching; but if He comes bearing the grief Himself that we may not bear it,

and if those lines of agony were wrought in His countenance because He carried our griefs and our sorrows, they ought to be to us the most attractive of all beauties. I reckon that the scar across the warrior's face, which he gained in defending his country, is no disfigurement to him; it is a beauty-spot. If my brother had, in saving my life, lost an arm, or received a hideous wound, he would be all the more beautiful in my esteem; certainly I could not shun him on that account. The wounds of Jesus are precious jewels which should charm our eyes, eloquent mouths which should win our hearts.—*Spurgeon.*

(β) With what scorn do your literary men speak of professed Christians! Have you ever seen the sneer upon the face of your "advanced thought" gentleman, and of the far-gone school of infidels, when they speak of the old women and the semi-idiots who listen to the pious platitudes of evangelical doctrines? They know how to despise us, if they know nothing else! But is such scorn worthy of men? It is only another version of the old sneer of the Pharisees when they said, "Hearest Thou what these say?" and pointed to the boys and the rabble, who shouted, "Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Contempt has always followed at the heels of Jesus, and it always will till the day of His glory.—*Spurgeon.*

The Humiliation and Exaltation of the Messiah.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

lii. 13–15. *Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, &c.*

I. The introduction of Christianity into the world by the mysterious sufferings of its Divine Founder.

"Behold my servant! Many were astonished at Thee: His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." This "astonishment of many" evidently refers to the inconsistency apparent between the high pretensions and the depressed condition of this Servant of God. The prophecies concerning Him (Hag. ii. 7; Gen. xlix. 10; Isa. ix. 6, 7, &c.) A sordid and earthly interpretation had enshrined these promises in the hearts of the Jewish nation. The Jewish patriot hailed, in expectation, the brilliant hour in which the Messiah should break to shivers the chains which held his country in subjection to the Roman yoke; while the man of narrow and selfish ambition rejoiced in the vision that gleamed before his eyes, when the descendants of Abraham should hold dominion over the prostrate nations of the world. When, therefore, the Saviour of the world appeared in the lowly garb of the son of the carpenter of Nazareth; when He shunned every effort for personal aggrandisement—resisted every popular movement to advance His regal claims—put forth His power only to heal the diseased and comfort the wretched—and, with a humility without parallel, and a sympathy that knew no exclusion, constantly mingled with the meanest and most despised of His countrymen; then the mortified expectations of the Jewish rulers burst with tremendous efficacy upon His devoted head. The evidence in favour of His high claims was speedily examined; it was strong, clear, obvious (John vii. 46; Matt. ix. 33, xxvii. 42); but it was as speedily rejected. The union in Him of power and suffering — of dignity and contempt — of riches to others and poverty to Himself, was a source of astonishment to many. Angels looked on, and wondered, and adored. In truth, the plan of Christianity, with its introduction into the world, is far above the calculations of human sagacity (1 Cor. i. 23, 24).

II. The declaration with regard to the universal diffusion of the religion of Christ on the earth. "My servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high."

1. "He shall deal prudently" is in the margin translated "He shall prosper," and thus the whole clause is declarative of the same truth — the triumph and success of the Son of God. If many were astonished at His humiliation, a far greater number shall be astonished at, and rejoice in, His exaltation. He has already established

upon earth the heavenly kingdom over which He rules.

2. This grand and glorious achievement He effected by means that came not within the expectation of the Jewish people, although they were clearly predicted. It was by death that He conquered death. It was by a perfect obedience in action and suffering that He became the second Adam—the spiritual Head of a new and happier race (Rom. iv. 25). He planted His religion on the earth, opposed by hostile scorn, relentless malice, and despotic power. In a few years the banner of the Cross waved upon the conquered fortresses of Paganism, and enlisted under its folds the great and mighty of the earth. Yet no earthly weapon had been raised in its defence nor in its assaults. The cause of Christ had achieved its victories by its own inherent power. It was resistless by its truth, and by the silent operations of the Spirit of truth. Its adherents were indeed strong, but it was in faith, purity, and charity. Thus the Servant of God prospered, was extolled, and became very high.

3. But His reign on the earth is yet very limited, and His conquests incomplete. "There remaineth yet much land to be possessed." Three-fourths of the human race are still the prey of idolatry or of imposture; and the ancient people of God are still outcasts from His favour, and the victims of unbelief.

III. WHAT WE MAY GATHER FROM THIS PROPHETIC ACCOUNT RESPECTING THE PROCESS BY WHICH THE KINGDOM OF THE MESSIAH SHALL BE FULLY AND FINALLY ESTABLISHED. "As many . . . shall they consider" (1 Cor. 14, 15). These declarations are full of information as to the process by which Christianity shall advance to her sacred and ultimate dominion. We are led to infer—

1. *That there shall be a wide dispersion of Divine knowledge over heathen and Mohammedan nations;* for men cannot see or consider that which is not presented to their notice.

2. *The nations shall fix their anxious attention on the truths declared to them.* Is there now before our eyes no such symptom of the approaching reign of Christ?

3. *Impressed with holy awe, they shall assume the attitude of abasement and submission.* The expression, "the kings shall shut their mouths at Him," implies the submission of whole nations, here represented by kings; for, as the reception of Christianity on the part of the rulers of a country requires the overthrow of every system of religious polity previously established, such a reception, publicly made, implies, more or less, the submission of the mass of people. Enlightened by the Divine Spirit, they shall recognise His righteous claims, receive His law, trust to His grace, and bow to His sway.

4. *He shall forgive their iniquities and sanctify their hearts.* "He shall sprinkle many nations"—that is, in allusion to the aspersions under the law, by which the people were sanctified, He shall apply to the souls of regenerated multitudes the blood of His great atonement, and the sacred influences of His Holy Spirit. Then the conquests of the Redeemer shall be visible and splendid (Ps. lxxii. 17).—*G. T. Noel, M.A., in Sketches of Sermons on Christian Missions,* pp. 114–119.

Of whom does the prophet speak? Not of the nation, but of an individual. That individual is not himself. No one corresponds, in the circumstances detailed, but the Christ. "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently," &c.

I. DESCRIBES HIS HUMILIATION. "My servant." He was appointed to a work. He assumed the human body, subjecting Himself to the conditions of a lowly human life, that He might be under law. He was voluntarily a servant under a master. He became subject to the Father's will, although that will involved His suffering unto death. He was fully acquainted with the solemn necessity for His suffering, in order to the accomplishment of the end, on which His heart was set as much as the Father's heart. Hence the sweep of His humiliation was all

the way from the bosom of the Father —the glory which He had with the Father—in heaven, to the lowliest conditions of an earthly life.

II. COMMENDS HIS CONDUCT. "Shall deal prudently." His conduct was uniformly consistent with the end He had in view. He pursued that end steadily from the beginning of His course, both when He eluded the vigilant hostility of His enemies, and when He allowed Himself to fall into their hands. He conducted Himself with perfect wisdom, so that everything happened in the way and at the time He intended.

III. PREDICTS HIS EXALTATION. "He shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high" (ch. liii. 11, 12). The exaltation follows the humiliation, and is its consequence (Phil. ii. 6–10). Note how varied are the elements of His exaltation, and how we have in them a complete and glorious fulfilment of this prediction. We see it fulfilled. Let us observe how it has followed His humiliation. Note these facts—

1. *In His resurrection from the dead.* On the third day from His crucifixion He rose from the grave (1 Cor. xv. 4–8). Its moral grandeur as evidence of His truth, and of the Father's acceptance of the work He had just performed in His death, is enhanced by the circumstance that He had predicted His resurrection on that day. This fact was made prominent in the apostolic ministry, especially at first; it was the main argument for the truth of Christ.

2. *In His ascension to heaven.* This was also witnessed by the apostolic company. And references to it in their sermons and epistles show how much importance they attached to it in relation to His personal distinction, and also in relation to His continued work and influence on His Church and on the world.

3. *In the pre-eminence assigned to Him.* He is at the right hand of God, which is the place of honour and prominence at the celestial court (Col. i. 18; 1 Pet. iii. 22; Eph. i. 20–23). All things are put under His feet.

4. *In the functions He discharges.* They arise out of the redemptive work which He accomplished on the Cross. They consist in (1.) *The restoration of His Church.* To this end He endowed His apostles with power to work miracles in His name. He commissioned them, and still commissions His ministers to preach the Gospel to every creature. He bestows spiritual blessings on sinful men (Acts v. 31; John xvii. 2; Heb. vii. 25; John xiv. 2). (2.) *In the certain subjugation of His enemies* (Ps. cx. 1). The gradual extension and final triumph of His empire (H. E. I. 979). (3.) *In the judgment of the world.* All judgment is committed to Him. In Matt. xxv. there is a representation of the proceedings of the great day of judgment, which represents the Lord Jesus Christ as the most august and illustrious personage in the universe.

5. *In the honour He receives.* From the Church on earth. The Church honours the Son even as it honours the Father. It renders to Him similar trust, love, and obedience. From the saints in heaven (Rev. v. 9, 10). From the angelic ranks (Rev. v. 12). From the whole universe (Rev. v. 13, 14).

Christian brethren, see that you exalt your glorified Saviour. Be not ashamed of your connection with Him. Let it be your boast, as it is unquestionably the cause of your real dignity. Glorify and extol Him by your praises, and by the holiness of your lives. And expect the final glorification with Him. For, like your Saviour, your days of conflict, toil, and suffering will be followed by the exaltation to heaven.—*J. Rawlinson.*

I. THE UNPARALLELED HUMILILIATION OF CHRIST.

1. The state of humiliation begins with the stupendous fact of *His incarnation* (Phil. ii. 6–8; 2 Cor. viii. 9, &c.) While we believe and teach the supreme divinity of Christ, we also exult in the wondrous fact that He became man. Two natures mysteriously united. Revelation af-

firms the fact, but not the mode. "Great is the mystery of godliness." A stoop of illimitable graciousness! His assumption of humanity was real and complete. It was "no God in disguise"—no mock assumption of humanity, the whole nature was taken on (H. E. I. 849–854).

2. His humiliation is seen *in His humble and lowly life, in fixed obedience to the law.* He was not born of "loins enthroned, or rulers of the earth," but of a poor virgin, &c. (Isa. vii. 14; Matt. i. 18–23; Luke i. 26–35; Matt. xiii. 55, 56; Mark vi. 3, 4). He was born in a stable at a common inn, &c. (Luke ii. 1–7, xii. 16). He wrought at the same employment with His reputed father (Matt. xiii. 55). The Lord of the world was subject to man! The Author of the law became its servant — submitted Himself to the rite of circumcision, and all the righteousness of the law, and accomplished it by a perfect obedience in deed and suffering. He was always poor (Matt. viii. 20, xvii. 24–27; Jno. xix. 25–27). He toiled, hungered, thirsted, and was weary; tempted of the devil and despised by man. Again and again He was declared to be a deceiver and in league with hell (Matt. iv. 1–11; John vii. 12, &c.) That He might be the comforter of the poor and wretched, He shunned not the poverty and wretchedness of men, &c.

3. *In His sufferings and death.* His whole life was one of suffering (ver. 14). His general appearance was so disfigured by excessive grief and distress, as scarcely to retain the appearance of a man (see Barnes, *in loco*). In every struggle and conflict of which man is capable, the Captain of our salvation shared a part. His humiliation was deeper still: "He humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross." The agony in the garden (Luke xxiii. 41–44); the betrayal (Matt. xxvi. 14–16, xxvii. 3, 4); the treachery of His disciples, &c. The weight of a world's sin; the dread hiding of His Father's countenance; the shameful, painful, and cursed death of the cross (Matt. xxvii. 46; Isa. liii. 10; John xix. 16–18; Phil. ii. 7, 8; Gal. iii. 13). While we treat of the depth of this suffering, let us meditate upon the dignity of the person undergoing such agony. What immeasurable love and compassion!

4. He was humbled *in His burial* (John xix. 38–42, &c.) The body of the Son of God lay lifeless in the grave until the morning of the third day!

Note carefully and remember well that the humiliation of Christ was *perfectly voluntary* (Phil. ii. 6–8, &c.) The will of the Father did not coerce the Son (John x. 11, 17, 18). With the entire concurrence of His will He thoughtfully and deliberately yielded Himself up to death, with all its attendant circumstances of shame and suffering, that He might accomplish the Father's will, and effect the redemption of mankind. He was a willing victim (H. E. I. 918). This was essential. There can be no merit in exacted suffering. Herein we behold the wonderful love of Jesus. In this voluntariness we are called to imitate our great pattern. How willingly we should give ourselves to Him who so willingly gave all He could give for us!

II. HIS UNPARALLELED EXALTATION. A happy transition. "He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." Concerning the fulfilment of this prediction, see preceding outline.

CONCLUSION.—From the wide field of instruction furnished by this subject, two or three reflections deserve particular consideration—

1. *We have the Divine attributes exhibited in a manner and to a degree they would never otherwise have been.*

2. *We see the way in which His followers may expect to go to heaven.* Like their Master, they must be humbled before they are exalted (Luke xviii. 14; Jas. iv. 10; 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12). Whatever we may have to pass through, let us remember that Jesus has gone before, &c. He prays that His people may be with Him (John xvii. 24), and in due time they who have suffered with Him shall also reign with Him.

3. *The manner in which these stupen-*

dous facts must affect the finally impenitent. What are they to you? Only wonderful events? Is there no intelligent personal interest in them? Your condemnation will not proceed on the evidence that you have profaned God's holy name, &c., but on the rejection of an offered Saviour—the one great, damning sin into which all other sins are merged (John iii. 19). Again, this once humbled but now exalted and glorified Saviour is offered for your acceptance (Ps. ii. 12).—*Alfred Tucker.*

The Face of Jesus.

lii. 14. *As many were astonished at Thee; His visage was so marred, &c.*

The personal *coming* of the Son of God was a great theme of prophecy. Changes of dynasties, national and local calamities, the raising up of heroes, the overthrow of sovereigns and of empires were predicted by the ministers of Jehovah; but the overthrow of the dominion of sin, by that man Jesus Christ, is the sublimest intelligence uttered by prophetic lips. The personal *character* of Christ is sketched in prophecy. He is to be different from ordinary men—their superior. He is to be open of heart, gentle of hand, sober of mind, consistent in conduct. The personal *circumstances* of Christ are mentioned. He is to come of royal stock, yet impoverished. Obscurity and lowliness are to be His portion in His domestic life, rejection and contempt in His public career. Yet are men to hear eagerly His words, and He is to be crowned with ultimate glory. The *countenance* of the Saviour, His personal appearance, is also referred to. These slight sketches were literally fulfilled. How different is the face of the infant from that of the dying man! During the tortuous course of life, the chisel of the energetic sculptor, Time, has been busy cutting deep furrows; the pencils of the twin painters, Sorrow and Care, have left the expression wan and worn.

I. **The text is a photograph of the face of Jesus in the hour of His death.** Let us meditate upon it. "Love and grief the heart dividing."

1. The face and form are those *of a man.* There is here flesh and blood; parts and features capable of expressing feeling.

2. Though in these respects a face like ours, yet how different! It is a visage marred; but not by evil life, evil disposition, infirmity, sickness, or age. In the Saviour's face there are, (1.) Lines which tell of *severe hardship.* He was made acquainted with hunger, thirst, and fatigue. He lived for others' welfare, comfort, and happiness, forgetting His own. (2.) Indications of *heavy sorrow* (ch. liii. 3, 4). A world's ingratitude pressed upon His spirit. A world's sin grieved Him. (3.) Traces of *anxious care.* He had come as the representative of His Father to men. He had undertaken to represent the case of man before His Father. What responsibility! (4.) Marks of *much suffering.* Allusion is made in the text not only to mental, but to physical suffering. Gethsemane's agony; the cruel usage in Herod's hall, where "He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair;" His sufferings under Pilate; the tortures of the crucifixion, remove all room for wonder at the statement of the text. There are actual scars upon His sacred Person; "the print of the nails;" of the thorn-crown; the spear-wound.

II. **We may reverently muse upon what is here revealed.** The face is but the outer mask; the soul is hidden within. The face is an index which reveals and expresses the feelings and experiences of the soul.

1. We learn from the face of Jesus *the reality of His life.* It is seen to have been intensely real. The visit to earth was no illusive *appearance* of the Son of God. To Him sin, human guilt, and Divine wrath were real and fearful

matters. The features of the grim soldier on the battle-field tell forth unmistakably his earnestness and anxiety; for with him it is a matter of glory or shame, of victory or death.

2. We see *the reality of His sympathy.* Life is to us a reality. It is a burden, an effort, a struggle. *He* understands our case. He has undergone all. Behold His face! Think upon His racked nerves, weary limbs, aching head, wounded spirit, broken heart! (Heb. iv. 15.)

3. We understand *the reality of His work.* God might have left us to our fate; but where would then have been the glory of His grace? He might have forgiven us and saved us with a word; but where then would have been the purity of His holiness, justice, and truth? "It behoved Christ to suffer."

4. We have now evidence of *the reality of His love* (John iii. 16, xv. 13; Eph. iii. 19; 1 John iii. 16).

(5.) We cannot now doubt *the reality of His Divinity.* The weakness of His humanity having endured the long trial of anxiety, pain, and sorrow, and having ultimately and perfectly triumphed, proves to us the fact and the glory of His Divinity.

III. Let us make application of this subject to ourselves. We look at Christ to learn of Him. 1. Is there not here matter for wonder? "As many were astonished at Thee." They said: "It is impossible, incredible, that this humble, patient sufferer can be the Christ" (ch. liii. 1). We wonder, not to doubt, but to adore. 2. Here is reason for admiration and love. What has the Lord endured for our eternal salvation? 3. We must remember to expect an experience very similar to that of our Lord. 4. We have here an example worthy of imitation. How patiently He endures all! (Heb. xii. 1, 2.) 5. Does not this revelation of the nature, character, and work of Christ afford us ground for trust? Saints may be assured of His sympathy. Sinners may see in His substitutionary suffering their salvation.—*Robert S. Latimer: Study and Homiletic Monthly*, New Series, vol. iii. pp. 164–166.

Our Marvellous Redeemer.

lii. 14, 15. *As many were astonished at Thee; His visage, &c.*

This prophecy runs through chapter liii. It sets forth the exaltation of the Messiah, which was to be preceded by His humiliation. There would be surprise and disappointment in some cases, while there would be surprise and admiration in others.

I. View the Saviour as attracting universal attention. "That which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider."

Some men cannot fail to attract attention whether they court it or not There is something in their appearance, or manner, or intelligence, or power of expression, or sympathy, on account of which, wherever they are, they become the object of general interest. Jesus was one of these when here. Sometimes He tried to escape from the crowd. But He could not be hid. He was largely discussed by the people of His country and time; in some cases favourably, in other cases very unfavourably. In the end they rejected His claims.

He soon after attracted very wide attention outside Judaism. For it was part of His plan and purpose that after His earthly life and work were completed, He should be proclaimed more extensively than among His own countrymen. His apostles preached Him freely among the heathen. Not without effect. Communities sprang up in every direction in Asia and in Europe, called by His name, and held together by their common belief of the things concerning Him. One apostle quotes this part of our text in illustration of his own action in spreading the knowledge of Christ among the heathen (Rom. xv. 20, 21).

He attracts attention still. He is extensively preached and believed in at the present time; more than at any previous time. He exerts the most valuable and gracious influence on those that receive His truth. He gradually through them leavens and modifies society, making His influence felt even where it is not recognised as His. His claims are regularly brought before the attention of countless multitudes, and are more or less considered by them. And they are, according to prophetic Scripture, destined to be made known over the wide world.

II. View Him as exciting extreme astonishment. 1. His *humiliation* did. "As many were astonished at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." Were the sufferings of Jesus depicted on His face? Was the personal beauty which tradition attributes to Him spoiled by His experience of suffering? That Messiah should appear in so lowly a form as did Jesus of Nazareth, excited disappointed astonishment. There was a revulsion of feeling even on the part of many who had been at first favourably inclined. They could not believe that the great Messianic King would come in so lowly a form.

2. His *exaltation* did. Even the disciples who believed in Him, and had heard Him speak of resurrection, were astonished when it occurred. The ascension surprised them still more. But they were joyfully surprised. The Jews could not believe that the Crucified One was crowned.—Thus it is still. Christ does not command universal faith even where His claims are known. Men do not trust those whom they deem unfortunate. They cannot receive a humbled Christ. The offence of the cross has not ceased. That He who was crucified should be exalted is of difficult belief to many. Yet some believe. They admire, while they wonder at, the wisdom and the love that shine through the redemptive plan.

III. View Him as bestowing saving blessings. "So shall He sprinkle many nations." This word is capable of two interpretations. 1. That which points directly to the impartation of the blessing. Under the law there were washings and sprinklings that made reconciliation for sinners, or cleansed them from sin. When Jesus comes with His salvation He reconciles to God, and cleanses the soul from sin. 2. That which points to the effect of the blessing. They shall spring up with joy, as those leap who have found great treasure. Is not the influence of Christ joy-creating everywhere?

He does this on an extensive scale. "Many nations." There is a universal sufficiency in His atoning blood. There is also a widely extensive efficacy. The Gospel is for man. Jesus bade His followers preach it among all nations. The redeemed are a multitude that no man can number (Rev. v. 9).

IV. View Him as winning reverent homage. "The kings shall shut their mouths at Him." It indicates the reverence in which they hold Him who conquers all opposition. It includes, 1. *Honour*. They see His power and glory, with which none can vie. Like conquered kings they confess His superiority. 2. *Love*. For He attaches them to Himself with personal admiration and love. 3. *Obedience*. They willingly obey His commands, although formerly they resisted His authority; for His laws are written on their hearts.

Thus the text exhibits not only the glory of Christ, but the great importance of the sentiments with which He is regarded.

1. Some hate Him. The Gospel does not commend itself to their approbation. It is utterly distasteful to them. Its doctrines are too humbling, or its precepts are too holy. Their pride flies from the Crucified, their sinfulness from the crowned Saviour. A mighty change must take place in your spirit before you can be safe.

2. Some are indifferent to Him. You think it matters little what you think of Christ, so long as you are not actively hostile to Him. But it does matter. Union with Christ; a spiritual

union, formed with consent of mind, and heart, and will, makes all the difference between life in Christ, and death without Him.

3. Some love Him. There is a deep personal love between Christ and His people. Although on the throne of the universe, He finds room in His heart for each believer, however lowly, and they for Him; "Whom, having not seen, ye love."—*J. Rawlinson.*

The Prevalence of Unbelief.

liii. 1. *Who hath believed our report?*

I. The description here given of the Gospel. It is a "*report.*" A report is a statement made to us of facts existing, or of events that have occurred, at some distance of time or place, and which we ourselves have not witnessed. Reports we accept or reject according to the degree of credibility which attaches to those who bring them to us. The Gospel is a "report." As such it surpasses all others—

1. *In the importance of the truths which it professes to communicate to us.* Consider what they are: What God hath done to deliver us from the bondage and condemnation of sin; how we may approach Him with favour and acceptance; what He has prepared for His people in the world to come; how we may qualify ourselves to share in "the inheritance of the saints in light." What communications can be compared with these for importance?

2. *In the evidence by which it is confirmed.* No other report was ever so authenticated as this. It has in its favour the testimony of friends and enemies, Jews and Gentiles. The statements of its first preachers were confirmed by miracles (Mark xvi. 20). The predictions contained in their writings have been fulfilled: *e.g.*, the dispersion of the Jews; the wide extension of Christ's kingdom. We have the testimony of our own senses to the truth of this "report." The Gospel professes, where it is received and obeyed, not only to ensure the possession of an eternal inheritance in heaven, but even on earth to work a great and glorious change in the hearts and characters of men, and to deliver them from the practice and power of sin. As a matter of fact, is not this change produced by the preaching of the Gospel? Might we not say to some of our acquaintances what Paul said to the Corinthians (1 Cor. vi. 11)? Let us remember that every such instance of a moral change effected by the Gospel is a proof of its truth, a convincing evidence that it is indeed "the power of God unto salvation," and an additional reason for believing that the promises which it makes concerning the life to come are equally worthy of credit (H. E. I. 1144–1148). Yet this "report," so important and so completely authenticated, is extensively rejected.

II. The question which the prophet asks in reference to it. "*Who* hath believed our report?" There never has been an age in which this question might not have been asked. It may well be asked to-day. True, many nations are professedly Christian; true, the majority of our fellow-countrymen would consider it a grievous insult if we were to call them infidels. But to *believe* this report is not merely to *assent* to the truth of it. Belief in the truths it makes known to us implies such a reception of them into the heart as shall influence our conduct. The very nature of the report shows that such is the belief intended and required. They are not changes in which we have no concern, but changes in which consequences so momentous to ourselves depend, that it is impossible but that a hearty persuasion of their being true must lead us to act accordingly. If we do not *so* act, the inference is plain and just that we do not really believe the report. It

is quite clear which of the Egyptians believed, and which of them rejected, the "report" Moses carried to them (Exod. ix. 20, 21). If a man were told that at a certain hour his house would be attacked, and his goods plundered; or that a certain part of a road along which he had to travel was infested by robbers, and he took no precautions to defend himself against the evil of which he was warned, would you not conclude that he gave no credit to the warning? Apply this test to the subject before us. Look round on society, and say whether it is not true that very few men really believe the "report" of the Gospel. Put on one side the openly irreligious, the self-righteous and the profane, the false and hypocritical professors of religion, all of whom, it is certain, do not "believe" the "report," and what are the numbers that remain? Are they not few? few in comparison with those you have set aside. Do not call this inference uncharitable, it is Scriptural (Matt. vii. 14). Instead of resisting a conclusion so clearly proved, make a practical use of it. Are there few that be saved? Then *strive* yourselves to enter in at the strait gate (Luke xiii. 24).—*E. Cooper: Practical and Familiar Sermons*, vol. vii. 68–84.

Isaiah foresaw that his message concerning the Messiah would be received with unbelief, and our Lord and His apostles had sad experience of the correctness of the prophet's anticipation (1 Cor. i. 23; 2 Cor. vi. 8, &c.) Want of faith in, and obedience to, the heavenly message was not the sin only of those to whom it was first sent. The nature of man is still the same. Still he is naturally inclined to unbelief, to refuse the good and to choose the evil, and to turn away from the truth when it is presented to him. Therefore the ministers of the Gospel still have to complain of the grievous neglect it meets with.

I. THE NATURE AND SUBSTANCE OF THAT REPORT WHICH THE SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST MAKE KNOWN TO YOU.

It is the same which the inspired prophet proclaimed—glad tidings of salvation in and through a suffering Redeemer. It sets before us, not temporal, but everlasting things; it deals with our eternal interests, and the way to heaven! It is "a report *so marvellous*, that it fills heaven and earth with wonder; *so true*, that we may as well doubt our own existence as entertain a doubt respecting it; *so interesting*, that all the things of time and sense are, in comparison with it, but as the dust of the balance; and *so joyous*, that it is a certain and inexhaustible source of happiness to all who receive it" (*Simeon*). It might be expected, then, that it would meet with universal attention. But when we look around and observe what manner of people the bulk of mankind are, we cannot but feel impressed with the sad truth that the religion of the crucified Saviour is of all objects the least attended to.

II. WHY IS IT THAT SO MANY WILL NOT BELIEVE OUR REPORT?

1. Some believe not because *they are too much exalted in the pride of human reason;* think too highly of themselves, are too full of worldly wisdom to submit to be taught of God. The humbling doctrines of the Cross are against "the vanity of their minds," they will not receive them.

2. *The love of this world* causes many to disregard our report. The doctrine of the Cross is diametrically against all worldly desires. It admits of no divided hearts (Luke ix. 23; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15; Gal. vi. 14). But "the children of this world" are devoted to *it*. Their whole heart is set upon it, and all their hopes, pleasures, and pains spring from it. Therefore, when the servant of God delivers his report to them, he is dismissed with the words, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

3. Another great cause of the disbelief of our report is *the prevailing power of sin*. The doctrine of a cruci-

fied Redeemer is a "doctrine which is according to godliness" (Titus ii. 11, 12; Gal. v. 24). This is one main reason why we cannot prevail upon men to listen to the message from God which we deliver. The consciousness of guilt induces many to wish it were not as we testify. And when men *wish* earnestly, they soon bring themselves to *believe*. They persuade themselves, therefore, that heaven and hell are but names, and that the Gospel is no more than an empty sound (John iii. 19).

Thus, from one cause or another, the Saviour is still "despised and rejected of men."

CONCLUSION.—Can any one imagine for a moment that God will suffer the greatest of His blessings to be thus lightly esteemed? To such men the servants of God are commissioned to lift up the awful voice of warning, and to proclaim the punishment of disobedience (Heb. ii. 3; 1 Pet. iv. 17; Hos. xii. 2; Isa. lxvi. 14, 15; Jer. xiii. 16, 17; H. E. I. 2438).—*Jonathan Walton, B.D.: Sermons*, vol. ii. 410–427.

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1. Let us reflect on the great guilt of unbelievers in a Gospel land, and the awful condemnation to which they stand exposed.

2. If there are many who hear the report of the Gospel, and yet believe it not, each one should be solicitous for himself. We believe that the doom of those around us who neglect the Gospel will be awful, and we flatter ourselves that we shall escape it. But what is the ground of our hope?—Some of you do not even pretend to an evidence of your *present* title to salvation, but you hope to obtain it by a *future* compliance with its conditions. But had not many who have perished in their sins, as strong resolutions of future repentance as you have? What will *your* intentions do for you?

3. We learn that the unsuccessfulness of the Gospel is not always to be imputed to the want of fidelity or ability in the preachers of it. It must often be ascribed to some other cause. The prophets of old, the apostles, yea, our Saviour complained, "Who hath believed our report?" Zeal and diligence in ministers are most important; but if you are unsaved, the probability is, that the fault lies, not in the ministers to whom you have listened, but in *you*.—*Joseph Lathrop, D.D · Eighty Sermons*, pp. 243–247.

I. *The Gospel is a message or report to man, upon matters of supreme importance.* 1. The character and claims of God. 2. The character and the condition of mankind. 3. The method of salvation by the intervention of a Mediator.

II. *The Gospel is communicated to man for the express purpose of being believed.* 1. The Gospel is worthy of faith, on account of the evidence by which it is confirmed. 2. Faith in the report of the Gospel is the only medium by which it can be rendered available to our safety and final happiness. 3. Faith in the Gospel results from the operation of Divine power upon the soul.

III. *It frequently becomes a matter of solemn inquiry as to the number of those by whom the Gospel has been embraced.* 1. Observe the implication which this inquiry involves—that there are but few persons comparatively to whom the testimony of the Gospel is presented, who cordially and truly embrace it. This implication was plainly truthful and correct, in connection with the prophet himself, in his own age. The same implication was correct, in regard to the ministry of the Lord Jesus, the apostles and preachers in the past and present age.

2. This being the nature of the implication, you must also observe the results which from that implication must be produced. (1.) Compassion must be produced. (2.) Exertion. Remember the obligation of faithful, and intense, and incessant exhortation lies also upon all and upon each of you; and if you lose your opportunity and sacrifice your influence in the world, when opportunity might be employed and influence might be exerted in the Church, and for Christ,

and for souls, take heed how you answer for the deficiency, when blood shall be required at your hands. (3.) Prayer. The influence of the Divine Spirit, to which we have adverted, is to be sought and is to be obtained by prayer.

CONCLUSION.—If, amid these scenes of privilege, *you* die in your sins, and thus enter into a retributive eternity, you will know by your own history what it is to be a lost soul.—*The Preacher's Treasury:* pp. 109–110.

I. *The "report" here spoken of.* 1 Its general contents. 2. Its great importance.

II. *How we are required to believe it.* 1. Practically, with our hearts. 2. Seasonably, without delay. 3. Perseveringly, without declension.

III. *The effects of this belief.* 1. It delivers from the burden of guilt, and the dominion of sin. 2. It blesses instantly. 3. It keeps constantly. It rewards eternally.—*Four Hundred Sketches,* vol. ii. p. 89.

WHY SO FEW BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.

liii. 1. *Who hath believed our report?*

Generally the most powerful preaching of the Gospel has been with little fruit. So that Isaiah had this sad complaint, "Who hath believed our report?" Our Lord Jesus Christ had it also (John xii. 37). When it was so with sweet Isaiah in the Old Testament, and with our blessed Lord in the New, who spoke with such power and authority, you may see there is reason for us to inquire, Why it is that so few believe? *i.e.*, believe to the salvation of the soul. It is with those causes only which are most common and operative that I would now deal frankly, "speaking the truth in love."

I. LACK OF APPRECIATION AND CONSIDERATION OF THE GOSPEL. 1. *You do not think yourselves in danger.* You confess that you are sinners, but in your hearts you do not think so. In your own opinion, you are good friends with God already. You do not believe that you are the slaves of Satan, and that you are on your way to hell. You are like the Scribes and Pharisees who were well satisfied with themselves, and thought they had no need of a physician, and therefore never sought Christ's help. His offer of help they angrily rejected (John viii. 33), and *you* resent any plain speaking concerning your real state.

2. *Hence, also, you neither appreciate nor consider the glad tidings that are brought to you.* You are not awake to the fact that the Gospel is the very thing you need to hear. You do not hear or read it as a merchant on the verge of ruin reads a cheque which a wealthy friend has sent to save him from bankruptcy. Thinking of yourselves as you do, you give no heed to it. Your sad lack in this matter is shown in three ways. (1.) By the way in which you come to hear the Gospel. How few hunger and thirst for it, and come desiring to learn from it how you are to prepare to meet with God! You come, not to profit by it, but for some defective and worthless reason (John vi. 26). (2.) By the way you behave when you are here. Many of you are inattentive; your thoughts are running after your trade, &c.; and some of you even sleep! Were you in any other meeting about ordinary business, how different your outward and inward conduct would be! (3.) By the way you behave after you have heard the Word. In what unedifying conversation you will be engaged as soon as you have reached the door! When you have heard what plainly meets the needs of your soul, do you meditate upon it, and go to your knees with it before God, desiring Him to breathe upon it, and to make it a blessing to you?—You know these things are true. Oh, "take heed how you hear!" As long as you take no heed how you hear, you cannot profit (H. E. L., 2575, 2576, 2604).

II. LACK OF REAL FAITH THAT THE

GOSPEL IS FROM GOD. You resent the charge that you are practically infidels, but your conduct shows that it is unbelief, and not faith, that has possession of your heart. At the most, yours is what is called "an historical faith," and that is worthless. (α) Your *conduct* shows that you do not really believe what the Gospel teaches—that there is a holy, just, and powerful God, else you durst not live at enmity with Him; that your nature is corrupt, else you would seek regeneration and sanctification; that there will be a day of judgment, in which you must stand before God, else you would prepare for it; that the only way to peace with God is through Jesus Christ, and that there is no way to heaven but the way of holiness, else your whole life would be different from what it is.

III. LOVE OF THE WORLD—of its wealth and its pleasures. This is given as a main cause (Matt. xiii. 22). More perish in this pit of worldly-mindedness than in the pit of vice. (β) Many who are civil, and esteemed virtuous and frugal, perish here!

IV. IGNORANCE AS TO THE NATURE OF TRUE HAPPINESS. You do not look upon it as your happiness to have communion with God. Hence you are like those who were invited to the marriage of the king's son (Matt. xxii. 5). The offer of the Gospel has no weight with you. If a market of fine things at a cheap rate were proclaimed, ye would all run to it; but ye delight not in the Word of God, ye prize not the Gospel and the precious things it offers you. You deny this? Well, then, 1. How often have you thanked God for sending the Gospel to you? You say grace before meat; how often have you said grace for the Gospel? 2. How is it that you are so intermittent in your attendance at the preaching of it? Were a messenger sent you from some great man, how you would arrange all your affairs so as not to miss it! But to the sanctuary, where messages from God are delivered, you come rarely, or at the most only once on the Lord's-day. 3. If you had reason to believe that you were heir to an earthly estate, how careful you would be to put yourself in possession of all the evidence of your right to it! But how much trouble have you taken to make sure that the "inheritance" of which the Gospel speaks to us shall ever be yours? Alas! it is too clear that you think happiness is to be found in earthly things, and not in the heavenly things the Gospel offers you.

V. STRUGGLING AGAINST CONSCIENCE. Some of you have been made sometimes to tremble as Felix did; but like him you have pushed off the appeal, and put off your decision to another time, and gone away to some company or recreation, that so you might stifle the conviction, and drive it out of your thoughts. So you have struggled against conscience awakened and alarmed by sickness, bereavement, &c.

VI. SAYING "PEACE, PEACE," WHEN PEACE HAS NOT BEEN MADE. There are still in the world many Laodiceans (Rev. iii. 17). 1. Some of you have attained to a sort of outside reformation, and you think on that account that you are well enough, and on good terms with God. But there must be more than reformation; there must be regeneration, a new heart! (H. E. I. 4069–4081). 2. Some of you pray, and you think something of that. But mere mechanical prayer is worthless (Matt. vi. 7). 3. Some of you think you have faith enough, because you have "historical faith." Alas! many of you have as much believing as keeps you from faith in Christ! [Like a man who believes that a certain life assurance company is a sound one, but does not insure his life with it, and yet feels that he has done all he ought to have done for the welfare of his family after his death! But in our secular life such folly is impossible.] 4. Some of you are satisfied because at times your heart has been tender, and then you formed good resolutions. But this is one of the rottenest of the props on which you could rest. Such tenderness of heart is transient, and mere resolutions, mere intentions, never profited any man.

VII. BEING SATISFIED WITH THE

APPROVAL OF MEN. It is not the commendation of men, but the commendation of God that you should seek mainly after; and yet if you think that good men esteem you, you suppose you are good enough; like the foolish virgins who were so secure because the wise took them and retained them in their company. This is the ruin of many, especially when they look about them, and observe in others some sin from which they abstain (Luke xviii. 11). Self-approval added to the approval of their fellow-men satisfies them, though they lack "the one thing needful."

VIII. RESTING IN THE MEANS OF GRACE. The things through which all men should be saved ruin many. Where the Gospel is in any measure powerfully preached, there are many more secure and fearless than if they had it not; having the Gospel, they feel as if they were in no danger, and could believe it when they pleased. Against this danger our Lord has expressly warned us (Luke xiii. 26). If you do this, ere long against *you* the door will be shut (Luke xiii. 25). Thank God for the means of grace, but do not rest in them (H. E. I. 3426–3437).—*James Durham: Christ Crucified*, pp. 50–55.

(α) Many say they believe there is a Saviour, and that He is God and man, and that such as believe on Him shall be saved, and on this they rest. It is such as these who think they have believed ever since they had any knowledge, because the Word was always, or very long since, received in the place where they lived for the Word of God, and they believe it to be so, and know no difference between believing the Word and believing on Christ holden forth in it; though, alas! many of you believe not this much, for if you were among the Jews ye might soon be brought to question the truth of the Gospel. But though ye had the real faith of the truth of the Word, take not that for saving faith, for as there is a real sorrow that is not the saving grace of repentance unto life, so there is a sort of real faith that hath a real object and a real being in the judgment, which yet is not a real closing with Christ, and so not saving faith; as suppose a man pursued by his enemy should see a strong castle door standing open, or one in hazard at sea should see dry land, yet if he should stand still while the enemy pursues him, or abide still in the sinking vessel, the sight of the castle door open, or of the dry land, would not save him. So it is not believing that there is a Saviour come into the world to save sinners, that will save, except there be a resting on Him as He is holden forth in the Word of the Gospel. Historical faith is only (as it were) a looking on the Saviour; but saving faith cleaves to Him and rests on Him. Historical faith looks on Christ, but acts not on Him, closes not with Him; and therefore such as have this only, and no more, sink and perish without getting good of Him.—*Durham.*

See H. E. I. 1935–1942, 1957–1968.

(β) The operative cause against believing the Gospel is not oppression, nor stealing, but entanglement with and addictedness to the things of this present world; folks allowing themselves too much satisfaction in their riches and pelf, counting themselves as if all were well if they have it, and grieved if they want it; as if there were nothing but that to make happy, being wholly taken up about it, and leaving no room for the concerns of their souls, for prayer and seeking of God.—*Durham.*

COUNSELS AND CONSOLATIONS FOR DISAPPOINTED CHRISTIAN WORKERS.

liii. 1. *Who hath believed our report, &c.*

Is this really the language with which you are obliged to return from your attacks on the kingdom of darkness? I would fain hope that this is not the case with you all, nor altogether the case with any of you. But to whatever extent you may thus justly complain, I express my sympathy with you. Such disappointment is unquestionably a source of grief, for, 1. Here is labour lost, and in a task on which our heart was set. 2. Your labour is without one of the most natural and satisfactory tokens of your heavenly Father's acceptance of it. 3. The spiritual wretchedness of men continues, notwithstanding all your efforts to relieve it. 4. Perpetual dishonour is done to God. Still His name is blasphemed, His glory disregarded, His law trampled on, His mercy despised; and can you, as a friend of God, look on such a scene, and not glow with a holy indignation?

To sympathy we add some considera-

tions by which your feelings may be regulated and turned to advantage.

I. Your judgment respecting your success is probably, and almost certainly, fallacious. 1. Even if everything were known to us, it is much too soon for any judgment to be formed. The time during which the instructions we have given may operate to produce conviction and conversion is not yet terminated, so that calculation is quite set at defiance. As seed may lie buried long in dust, and yet ultimately vegetate, so knowledge communicated and disregarded now may have decisive influence hereafter, when some circumstance shall induce reflection upon it.

2. Your opportunity for exertion is not yet past; so that if what you have already done be not of itself effectual, it may become so in combination with what you or others may hereafter do.

3. We are far from knowing everything which has *already* occurred. (1.) Some of those for whose good we have laboured are not under our observation at all, so that, if we have done them any good, we are not likely to know it until the day of God. (2.) There is something in the commencement of piety often dubious or studiously concealed.—We can never be entitled to affirm that we have had no success, until the arrival of the final day, when for the first time the volume of providential history will be laid open to our view.

II. But, suppose that your success is quite as small as you imagine it to be. What then? Make it a matter of serious examination. 1. *Whether your exertions have been such as to authorise the expectation of success.* Defects and improprieties may have attended them, which will sufficiently account for their inefficiency, without attributing it to the absence of the Divine blessing. Have you really been *trying* to convert sinners?

2. *Whether, when you have striven to save a soul, you have used the Divinely appointed and adapted means.* The only means is the Word of God, which throws light into the understanding, and makes it appeal to the conscience and to the heart upon spiritual grounds.

3. *Whether, if you have used the right means, you have used them in a proper manner.* Have you, according to the Scriptures, made clear the grounds of duty, the nature and evil of sin, the righteousness of God's anger, and the method of fleeing from the wrath to come? Or, have your instructions been defective, inconsistent, or obscure? How much of solemnity, faithfulness, and tenderness have you carried into the work?

4. *Whether your labours have been conducted in a right spirit towards God.* Have you devoutly acknowledged the necessity of the Holy Spirit's aid, and rendered due honour to His gracious agency? What has been your leading aim and impelling motive? Has it been your first and ardent desire to glorify God, by bearing a testimony for Him in His controversy with a rebellious world, and thus striving to reconcile sinners to Him?

When we think what means should be employed for the conversion of sinners, in what manner and in what spirit, we may find causes enough why *we* have not been successful, without ascribing it to the sovereignty of God.

III. Perhaps, after the most serious examination, you may be ready to hope that your labours have contained something on which your Heavenly Father might smile, and yet you do not see the blessing you have hoped for on your toil. Conclude, then, that the Lord has been pleased to withhold from you His blessing; and observe the lights in which this state of things may be regarded.

1. It is to be considered, undoubtedly, as an act of that holy, wise, and gracious sovereignty which the Most High is continually exercising in the administration of His affairs. You would not for a moment deny that He is entitled to such a sovereignty, or imagine that He can make an improper use of it. Submit unquestioningly and unmurmuringly to what may be His will in regard to the conversion of sinners by your instrumentality.

2. If you look through the history of His ways, you will find that many of His most honoured servants have partaken of similar discipline. What but unsuccessful was the ministry of Enoch, Noah, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, and Isaiah—yea, of our Lord Himself? Now, the servant is not above his Lord: it is enough, and should be enough even for you, that the servant be *as* His Lord.

3 You tremble for the cause of God, which you have desired to see prospering in your hands. But you need not do this. Your individual exertions constitute but a small fraction of the agency which is employed for the advancement of His kingdom, and is far too insignificant to affect materially the measure of its success. The blasting of a single field does not sensibly affect the harvest. The resources of the Almighty are sufficiently ample to secure the accomplishment of His purposes (ch. lv. 10, 11).

4. No good work is really lost. If instruction and expostulation be not effectual to the conversion of the sinner, it *is* conducive to the glory of God, since it carries into operation that system of equitable and merciful probation which He has established in His government of mankind, and by the result of which, alike in the penitent and the impenitent, He will be eminently glorified. If sinners do not obey, we still bear a testimony for God, and not only uphold His rights and honours in the world now, but prepare for their fuller and more glorious manifestation hereafter.

5. God in His sovereignty is infinitely wise, and the ends which He brings to pass are, on the whole, the very best that can be attained. If any desirable end is passed by or frustrated, *it is only that one more desirable may be secured.* In this view, it may be truly affirmed that there is no failure, and no unsuccessfulness. And if *He* sees it good that an object should be produced by our labours differing somewhat from that which we have contemplated, a firm ground is laid for our acquiescence in His will.

6. We who labour shall not lose our reward. We may lose, indeed, what it would be unspeakably delightful to attain, namely, the rescue of sinners from the wrath to come; but still we shall gain something, even an appropriate and blessed recompense (2 Cor. ii. 14–16).

IV. From whatever cause your want of success may have arisen, it is adapted to yield you instruction and benefit.

1. *If you feel justified in referring it to God's sovereign pleasure, you will find occasion for corresponding exercises of mind.* (1.) You must learn to blend ardent desire with silent submission, and to resign without a murmur an object for which you have striven with your utmost ardour. (2.) The object upon which our hearts should be chiefly set is the glory of God. But we are too apt, either to confine our view to the salvation of men, or to attach to it a disproportionate value. Let our disappointments rectify this evil. Without at all diminishing our desire for the salvation of men, which is much too feeble, let them teach us that we ought to contemplate the glory of God as our chief end, and be willing *in any way* to promote it by our labours. —The benefit of our learning these lessons effectually will not be confined to our personal experience, it will extend to our work. It is when we are annihilated before God that He may begin to exalt us; when we have learned to acquiesce in His will, He may grant us our own; when we come to seek first His glory, He may afford us more extensively the salvation of men.

2. *If, on the other hand, we find reason to conclude that our want of success arises from our own defects, it is obvious that this is a loud call* (1) to humiliation; and (2) to give all diligence in becoming better fitted for a work which we may not resign, and the issues of which are so unspeakably solemn.

V. Want of success in our labour ought not to induce either abandonment or despondency.

1. Never suffer yourselves to say, "It is of no use to try any longer."

(1.) Under no circumstances ought you to desist from taking a part with God in His righteous controversy with mankind. (2.) The object of saving men from everlasting destruction is clearly too important to be relinquished, while any possibility of accomplishing it remains.

2. As for despondency, it does endless mischief, and is utterly destitute of reason. (1.) The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. It may be that He only looks for another resolved effort on your part, and for a little more exercise of faith and patience, before He pours out an abundant blessing. It is characteristic of His ways to try faith before He rewards it. (2.) If you seem reduced to the necessity of despondency, that is just a reason why you should imbibe fresh hope. All your self-sufficiency having perished, now make another effort, more eminently in the name and strength of the Lord, and peradventure He will be with you. (3). Despondency is inevitably mischievous. Under its influence, you will either set about nothing at all, or nothing heartily. And nothing is to be wrought by a despairing hand (1 Cor. xv. 58; Gal. vi. 9).—*John Howard Hinton, A.M.: The Active Christian*, pp. 241–264.

The Great Messianic Prophecy.

liii. 2–12. *For He shall grow up before Him, &c.*

Among the prophecies of Isaiah, that which is contained in the chapter before us stands eminent and illustrious. Received and interpreted according to the sense attached to it by Christians, it involves in it a striking proof of the truth and divinity of our holy religion. It does this simply as a prophecy, irrespective of its dogmatic or theological character. It is a prediction of what was to come to pass. It is not merely capable of being turned into a prediction by a little fancy or a little ingenuity, but it was uttered as such; it was meant when uttered to be received as such. And it was unquestionably in being—it was written and read—seven centuries before the events which are supposed to have fulfilled it. It is found in a Jewish, as distinguished from a Christian writing—in a writing admitted, preserved, believed, by those who have every reason for wishing this passage altered or expunged. After the appearing of Jesus Christ, a passage like this could not be introduced into the writings of Isaiah by Christians; the jealousy of the Jews would prevent that. It would not be introduced by the Jews; that would be inconsistent with their unbelief. To be here at all, it must have formed an original part of the prophetical Scriptures. Such it is admitted to be—and admitted by the Jew; he preserved and perused it as such before the appearance of the "Man of sorrows;" and after he had seen Him—seen Him "grow up as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground;" after he had looked upon Him and found in Him "nothing to desire," "neither form nor comeliness," nor verdure nor beauty; after he had "hid his face from Him" and "esteemed Him not," "wounded" and "bruised," and "imprisoned" and "oppressed" Him, "despised and rejected," and "smitten Him to death;" after this it was impossible for them to recede. The book was in the hands of both parties, and the passage in the custody of both; the Jew could not have expunged it, for the Church would have detected and denounced the fraud; the Christian would not, for he exulted in its existence and import. It there stands an acknowledged portion of a writing strictly and intentionally prophetic, uttered and recorded as prophetical, hundreds of years before the occurrence of all that it so distinctly and graphically describes. Now, the thing to be observed in connection with these remarks is this—that the particulars of the prophecy are so many, so minute, so singular, previously so improbable, that they could never have been foreseen by human sagacity, and surely never thrown together by any lucky but hazardous guesses. They were all fulfilled, and fulfilled with minute and marvellous fidelity in Jesus Christ. They apply to no other person; to Him they do apply, and apply with an accuracy which would be admitted to be wonderful and which never would be doubted, did it not involve the admission of the truth of His pretensions. That it does this is seen by the simplest of all arguments:—none can foresee future events but God; a clear and indubitable prediction is produced, having long afterwards its fulfilment in the character and history of one claiming a Divine mission; therefore (it is impossible to hesitate) that mission *was* Divine; *He* must have sent Him, who foresaw His coming, and foreseeing, foretold it.

Such is the value and use of every prophecy whose character and meaning are clearly ascertained, and whose import can be proved to have met its accomplishment. But the prophecy before us does more than this; it not only proves in relation to Christ, the truth of His pretensions, but it proves what some at least

of these pretensions were; it not only demonstrates that He came from God, but it also demonstrates what He came for—what He came to accomplish for man. If words are to be permitted to have any meaning, if the language of the Bible was intended to be understood, the prophecy is a declaration, positive, unequivocal, distinct—that Messiah was to be made a propitiatory sacrifice. His innocence is asserted, His righteousness declared, His exquisite agony, bodily and mental, alike described; Jehovah is represented as crushing Him, "bruising Him," and "putting Him to grief," and "making His soul an offering for sin;" He is Himself depicted as suffering as a substitute, as "bearing the griefs and carrying the sorrows" of others, as "wounded for their transgressions, bruised for their iniquities," on their account afflicted and stricken and smitten to death, and as having "laid upon Him the iniquity of them all." Every variety of phrase is employed, as if purposely to render mistake impossible, and to mark the importance of the subject itself.

Many translations of the passage have been attempted, but none succeeds in getting rid of and excluding its pervading idea. The Jew who rejects Christ, and who applies therefore the prophecy to his nation as a whole, and not to an individual, is endlessly embarrassed by its personal allusion; and the Christian (if Christian he be) who rejects the Redeemer's sacrifice and atonement, may alter and attenuate the phraseology of the passage, may change and modify and emasculate it, but the great truth cannot be concealed; its existence is indicated and its presence is felt, whatever be the language in which it is conveyed—aye, even in that which is carefully selected, not for the purpose of expressing, but of hiding it. The nature of the work of Christ, the "decease which He accomplished at Jerusalem," the efficacy of His sufferings, and the nature of His death, "His soul being made an offering for sin"—this truth is so abundantly borne out in the ample and illustrious prophecy before us, that it flames forth, however it may be clothed, just as the glory of Christ's body, when transfigured upon the Mount, shone through and illumined the robes He wore. It rises up in spite of every effort to reduce and to subdue it, even as the mighty champion of Israel snapped asunder the new ropes and the green withes by which he was attempted to be bound. —*T. Binney: Sermons, Second Series*, pp. 6–9.

That this chapter contains a direct prophecy of Jesus Christ is so plain, that I can scarcely conceive any serious objection to be made to it. The principal doubt which is likely to arise in the mind, is that it is so literal and particular as to seem to be rather a history foisted into the texts after the events had taken place, than a prophecy delivered seven hundred years before them. But this doubt is instantly removed, by considering that the Jews, the grand enemies of Christ, were the very persons to whom the preservation of this prophecy was intrusted: that they acknowledge it to be genuine; nor ever suggested a doubt as to its authenticity.

If, then, it is genuine, to whom can it relate? It would be a waste of time to attempt to confute the interpretations that have been given by the Jews of late years, by which it is made to apply to Hezekiah, to Jeremiah, &c. It will here be sufficient to observe, that as in a lock, consisting of numerous wards, *that* key alone is the true one which fits all the wards; so in prophecy, that only is the true interpretation of any prediction which fits every part of it; and the more numerous and *uncommon* such parts are, the more manifest is it, in the case of a perfect coincidence, that the true interpretation has been given. I say, the more *uncommon;* because if events are foretold which cannot possibly apply but to a few persons, the interpretation is then proportionably limited. If, for instance, a prophecy should relate to a king, this would narrow the range of interpretation to those who bore the kingly office; if to a king who had died a violent death, this would narrow it still more; if that death was inflicted by his own subjects, it would reduce still more considerably the number of persons to whom it could be applied. But in the present case there are circumstances so very peculiar that they can be applied to one person alone.

The person here spoken of was to be the servant of God, the arm of the Lord, the subject of prophecy. Yet when he came into the world, he was to be despised and rejected of men; he was not to be received as the Messiah; he was to be put into prison; he was to be brought as a lamb to the slaughter; many were to be astonished at him; his visage was to be marred more than any man's; he was to be numbered with transgressors, and cut off by a judicial sentence out of the land of the living; his grave was to be appointed with the wicked, yet his tomb was to be with the rich man. And his sufferings were to be of no ordinary kind, and inflicted for no common cause. He was to be wounded for our transgressions, and smitten for our iniquities. Jehovah was pleased to put him to grief, and to make his soul an offering for sin, though "he had done no wrong, neither was any guile found in his mouth." But after God had thus made his soul an offering for sin, then he was to revive again; to prolong his days; to erect a spiritual kingdom; to sprinkle many nations; to be advanced above kings, who should shut their mouths before him; to be exalted and extolled, and be very high; to see and be satisfied with the effect of the travail of his soul; to justify many by his knowledge; and to make intercession for transgressors.

Now, of those particulars, it is evident that most of them can be applied only to a few persons; some, from their very nature, to none but such a divine and extraordinary person as Jesus Christ; but that to Him all are appli

cable in the plainest and most literal sense. We may conclude, therefore, that if the real import of any prophecy is clear and indisputable, that of this chapter is so when it is made to refer to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.—*Venn.*

The Despised and Rejected Saviour.

liii. 3. *He is despised and rejected of men, &c.*

This is a summary of the history of our Lord, as it is recorded by the four Evangelists. His very first hours on earth may be cited in proof of its correctness. No place could be found for Him even in an inn. His life was a life of poverty. Scorn and insult followed Him everywhere. His life closed amid circumstances of unspeakable ignominy. In these facts we have,

I. *A reason for not being very strongly desirous of popularity.* It is natural to desire the approval of our fellow-men; but no wise and good man will make this the *end* of his actions. He will seek to do right; if men applaud him for doing so, well; but if not, he will not be greatly grieved. He will not murmur because he is called to drink of the cup that Christ drank of. Shall the servant be above his Lord?

II. *A consolation when fidelity to duty exposes us to unpopularity.* To be reproached and ridiculed; to have our actions misjudged and our motives misrepresented; to be deserted by those whom we regarded as our friends, to be pursued by the enmity of foes whom we have not wronged, is a bitter trial. But if it should be ours, let us remember that Christ trod the same path of suffering, and sympathises with us.

III. *An argument for entire consecration to the service of Christ.*—The shame and suffering of which the text speaks, Christ endured for us (1 Cor. v. 14–16).—*W. H. Sullivan, M.A.: Parish Sermons*, pp. 206–222).

The Man of Sorrows.

liii. 3. *A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*

The subject of the sorrows of the Saviour has proved to be more efficacious for comfort to mourners than any other theme in the compass of revelation, or out of it. Christ is in all attitudes "the consolation of Israel," but He is most so as a man of sorrows. As Aaron's rod swallowed up all the other rods, so the griefs of Jesus make our griefs disappear.

I. "A MAN." We can never meditate too much upon Christ's blessed person as God and as man. He who is here called a man was certainly "very God of very God;" "a man," and "a man of sorrows," and yet at the same time "God over all, blessed for ever." His manhood was not the less real and substantial. It differed from our own humanity in the absence of sin, but it differed in no other respect. He was no phantasm, but a man of flesh and blood, even as ourselves; a man needing sleep, requiring food and subject to pain, and a man who, in the end, yielded up His life to death (Phil. ii. 7).

This condescending participation in our nature brings the Lord Jesus very near to us in relationship. Inasmuch as He was man, though also God, He was, according to Hebrew law, our *goel*—our kinsman, next of kin. According to the law, if an inheritance had been lost, it was the right of the next of kin to redeem it. Our Lord Jesus exercised His legal right, and seeing us sold into bondage and our inheritance taken from us, came forward to redeem both us and all our lost estate. A blessed thing it was for us that we had such a kinsman!—It would not have been consistent with Divine justice for any other substitution to have been accepted for us, except that of a man. Man sinned, and man must make

reparation for the injury done to the Divine honour.

Sinner, thou mightest well tremble to approach Him whom thou hast so grievously offended; but there is a man ordained to mediate between thee and God (H. E. I. 889).

Every child of God ought also to be comforted by the fact that our Redeemer is one of our own race, tempted in all points like as we are, that He might be able to succour them that are tempted. The sympathy of Jesus is the next most precious thing to His sacrifice. (α)

II. "A MAN OF SORROWS." The expression is intended to be very emphatic, it is not "a sorrowful man," but "a man of sorrows," as if He were made up of sorrows, and they were constituent elements of His being. Some are men of pleasure, others men of wealth, but He was "a man of sorrows."

Our Lord is called "a man of sorrows," (1.) For *peculiarity*, for this was His peculiar token and special mark. We might well call Him "a man of holiness;" for there was no fault in Him: or a man of labours, for He did His Father's business earnestly; or "a man of eloquence," for never man spake like this man. Yet had we gazed upon Christ and been asked afterwards what was the most striking peculiarity in Him, we should have said His sorrows. The various parts of His character were so singularly harmonious that no one quality predominated, so as to become a leading feature. But there was a peculiarity, and it lay in the fact that "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men," through the excessive griefs which continually passed over His spirit. Tears were His insignia, and the cross His escutcheon. He was the warrior in black armour, and not as now the rider upon the white horse. He was the lord of grief, the prince of pain, the emperor of anguish, a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

2. By way of *eminence*. He was not only sorrowful, but pre-eminent among the sorrowful. All men have a burden to bear, but His was heaviest of all. Common sufferers must give place, for none can match with Him in woe. He who was the most obedient Son smarted most under the rod when He was stricken of God and afflicted; no other of the smitten ones have sweat great drops of blood, or in the same bitterness of anguish cried, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

The reasons for this superior sorrow may be found in the fact that with His sorrow there was no admixture of sin. Sin deserves sorrow, but it also blunts the edge of grief by rendering the soul untender and unsympathetic. We do not start at sin as Jesus did, we do not tremble at the sinner's doom as Jesus would. His was a perfect nature, which, because it knew no sin, was not in its element amid sorrow, but was like a land bird driven out to sea by the gale. To the robber the jail is his home, and the prison fare is the meat to which he is accustomed, but to an innocent man a prison is misery, and everything about it is strange and foreign. Our Lord's pure nature was peculiarly sensitive of any contact with sin; we, alas! by the Fall, have lost much of that feeling. Our hands grow horny with toiling, and our hearts with sinning; but our Lord was, as it were, like a man whose flesh was all one quivering wound; He was delicately sensitive of every touch of sin. We go through thorn-brakes and briars of sin because we are clothed with indifference, but imagine a naked man, compelled to traverse a forest of briars—and such was the Saviour, as to His moral sensitiveness. He could see sin where we cannot see it, and feel its heinousness as we cannot feel it: there was therefore more to grieve Him, and He was more capable of being grieved.

Side by side with His painful sensitiveness of the evil of sin, was His gracious tenderness towards the sorrows of others. All men's sorrows were His sorrows. His heart was so large, that it was inevitable that He should become "a man of sorrows."

Besides this, our Saviour had a peculiar relationship to sin. Sin was laid upon Him, and He was Himself numbered with the transgressors; and therefore He was called to bear the terrible blows of Divine justice, and suffered unknown, immeasurable agonies. "It pleased the Father to bruise Him, He hath put Him to grief." Behold the man, and mark how vain it would be to seek His equal sorrow.

3. To indicate the *constancy* of His afflictions. Born in a stable, sorrow received Him, and only on the cross at His last breath did sorrow part with Him. His disciples might forsake Him, but His sorrows would not leave Him. He was often alone without a man, but never alone without a grief.

4. Because of the *variety* of His woes; He was a man not of *sorrow* only, but of "*sorrows*." All the sufferings of the body and of the soul were known to Him. Affliction emptied its quiver upon Him, making His heart the target for all conceivable woes. (1.) Our Lord was a man of sorrows as to His *poverty*. Oh, you who are in want, your want is not so abject as His: He had not where to lay His head, but you have at least some humble roof to shelter you. (2.) Our Saviour knew the heart-rendings of *bereavement*. Jesus wept, as He stood at the tomb of Lazarus. (3.) Perhaps *the bitterest of His sorrows were those which were connected with His gracious work*. He came as the Messiah sent of God, on an embassage of love, and men rejected His claims. There was no name of contempt which they did not pour upon Him; nay, it was not merely contempt, but they proceeded to falsehood, slander, and blasphemy. There was not a word He spoke but they would wrest it; not a doctrine but what they would misrepresent it: He could not speak but what they would find in His words some occasion against Him. Was there ever man so full of goodwill to others, who received such disgraceful treatment from those He longed to serve? (4.) *His was a lonely life;* even when He was with His followers, He was alone. (*β*) (5.) In the last crowning sorrows of His life, there came upon Him the penal inflictions from God, the chastisement of our peace, which was upon Him. The sharpest scourging and severest griefs were all within; while the hand of God bruised Him, and the iron rod of justice broke Him, as it were, upon the wheel.

III. "ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF." 1. With grief He had an *intimate* acquaintance. He did not know merely what it was in others, but it came home to Himself. We have read of grief, sympathised with grief, sometimes felt grief: but the Lord felt it more intensely than other men in His innermost soul; He, beyond us all, was conversant with this black-letter lore.

2. It was a *continuous* acquaintance. It was indeed a *growing* acquaintance with grief, for each step took Him deeper down into the grim shades of sorrow. As there is a progress in the teaching of Christ and in the life of Christ, so is there also in the griefs of Christ. The tempest lowered darker, and darker, and darker. His sun rose in a cloud, but it set in congregated horrors of heaped-up night, till, in a moment, the clouds were suddenly rent in sunder, and, as a loud voice proclaimed, "It is finished!" a glorious morning dawned where all expected an eternal night.

3. This acquaintance of Christ with grief was a *voluntary* acquaintance for our sakes. He need never have known a grief at all, and at any moment He might have said to grief, Farewell. But He remained to the end, out of love to us, grief's acquaintance.

What shall I say in conclusion, but just this: let us admire the superlative love of Jesus. O love, what hast thou done! Thou art omnipotent in suffering. Few of us can bear pain, perhaps fewer still of us can bear misrepresentation, slander, and ingratitude. These are horrible hornets which sting as with fire: men have been driven to madness by cruel scandals which have distilled from venomous tongues

Christ, throughout life, bore these and other sufferings. Let us love Him, as we think of how much He must have loved us.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1099.

(α) It has been to me, in seasons of great pain, superlatively comfortable to know that in every pang which racks His people the Lord Jesus has a fellow-feeling. How completely it takes the bitterness out of grief to know that it once was suffered by Him! The Macedonian soldiers, it is said, made long forced marches which seemed to be beyond the power of mortal endurance, but the reason for their untiring energy lay in Alexander's presence. He was accustomed to walk with them, and bear the like fatigue. If the king himself had been carried like a Persian monarch in a palanquin, in the midst of easy, luxurious state, the soldiers would soon have grown tired; but, when they looked upon the king of men himself, hungering when they hungered, thirsting when they thirsted, often putting aside the cup of water offered to him, and passing it to a fellow-soldier who looked more faint than himself, they could not dream of repining. Every Macedonian felt that he could endure any fatigue if Alexander could. This day, assuredly, we can bear poverty, slander, contempt, or bodily pain, or death itself, because Jesus Christ our Lord has borne it.—*Spurgeon.*

(β) Even if they sympathised with Him to the utmost of their capacity, they could not enter into such griefs as His. A father in a house with many little children about him, cannot tell his babes his griefs; if he did they would not comprehend him. What know they of his anxious business transactions, or his crushing losses? Poor little things, their father does not wish they should be able to sympathise with him; he looks down upon them, and rejoices that their toys will comfort them, and that their little prattle will not be broken in upon by his great griefs. The Saviour, from the very dignity of His nature, must suffer alone. The mountain-side, with Christ upon it, seems to me to be a suggestive symbol of His earthly life. His great soul lived in vast solitudes, sublime and terrible, and there amid a midnight of trouble, His spirit communed with the Father, no one being able to accompany Him into the dark glens and gloomy ravines of His unique experience. Of all His life's warfare He might have said in some senses, "of the people there was none with me;" and at the last it became literally true, for they all forsook Him—one denied Him and another betrayed Him, so that He trod the wine-press alone.—*Spurgeon.*

"Behold the man!" There is a fascination in His human sympathies, tears, words, that is irresistible. As we toil on our way amid sorrow and distress, we remember Who it is that has power to succour the tempted (Heb. iv. 15). The Redeemer was emphatically "a man of sorrows." In the Gospel narrative this is more frequently implied than expressed, although there are not wanting passages in which it is definitely stated (Mark iii. 5; John xi. 35; Matt. xxvi. 37, 38).

There are various causes for sorrow:—

I. ISOLATION OF SPIRIT.—It is no mere conceit, in which the poet tells us that

> "Not e'en the tenderest heart, and next our own,
> Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh."

A wiser than he had said: "The heart knoweth its own bitterness," &c. This solitariness of spirit was the heritage of Christ.

1. *There was no spirit on earth that could claim perfect kindred with His spirit.* No sympathy—in the true use of the word—could be between Him and sinful souls. The best and holiest could not look upon life from His standpoint, nor enter into His feelings, nor share His aspirations.

2. *He was love personified; they were selfish.* The affections of His heart were perpetually welling up like an inexhaustible fountain; they were wrapped up in self, and knew no higher delight than self-gratification—no higher principle than love of self.

3. *His heart yearned after companionship, and found it not.* It called to its fellows, but they understood not its language. Hence He was alone (ch. lxiii. 3).

II. THE CONTEMPLATION OF SORROW IN OTHERS. This was pre-eminently the case with Jesus Christ. When the news of the Baptist's death was brought to Him, He went into the wilderness, but at the cry of human need He soon came forth again; and as soon as He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion toward them, and healed their sick. As He journeyed from place to place there were always appeals to His tenderest feelings. Not often was

He called to the house of mirth; but He was frequently sought to go to the house of mourning. We find Him once at a marriage feast; once at the table of Simon; twice "eating with publicans and sinners," and sharing the modest hospitalities of Bethany; but sorrowing hearts were always seeking His comfort and His help.

III. BEREAVEMENT. The world has never heard a more touching story than that at Bethany. For Himself He shed no tears, and gently reproved those who wept for Him; but the sight of misery in others drew floods of tears from His eyes.

IV. DISAPPOINTMENT. Of this Jesus tasted to the full. "He went about doing good;" surely from all the seed He sowed He had a right to expect a bountiful harvest! Yet the seed fell for the most part on unproductive soil (Matt. xiii. 1–9). The nine lepers who returned not to give thanks for their cleansing were but typical of multitudes who selfishly received all and gave nothing in return (Ps. cvi. 13). Thousands followed Him, because "they did eat of the loaves and were filled;" those who attached themselves to Him were but few, while even these left Him at the last. Was there not something of disappointment in the compassion that moved Him to say, "O Jerusalem," &c.? (Matt. xxiii. 37.) Said not Isaiah truly, He was "a man of sorrows"? Tears were His meat day and night, and He could say: "Reproach hath broken My heart," &c. (Ps. lxix. 20).—*Frederick Wagstaff: Study and Pulpit*, New Series (1876), pp. 237–239.

I. *The sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ.* A sanctuary we should enter with reverence, &c. 1. His were chiefly agonies of the soul. 2. The magnitude and intensity of any soul's sufferings are in proportion to the soul's greatness. The greater the soul, the greater its capacity for suffering. 3. How the agonies of His soul and body reacted upon each other. The agony of His soul, acting upon the body, produced utter prostration. His physical suffering reacted again upon His soul. 4. We must also take into account their propitiatory character.

II. *The relation of His sufferings to those of whom it is here said that they despise and reject Him.* 1. The object for which He came was to save them. 2. To despise and reject Him is a poor return for all His love. 3. We may well be ashamed that the Lord of life and glory should receive such treatment in our world. He is despised and rejected still. He that despiseth Christ wrongeth his own soul—deprives it of its highest and only true and enduring bliss. You cannot do without Christ.—*L. H. Byrnes, B.A.: The Christian World*, June 8, 1866.

How pathetic is the designation here applied to the Messiah, and how truly was it verified in Jesus—"A Man of Sorrows!"

I. *The fact that the Lord Jesus was, in His humiliation, a Man of Sorrows.* There are minds that resent this description, that deem it incredible that it should apply to a Divine Being, or regard such a picture as marred by an unwholesome sentiment. In fact, the true and full impression of the picture can only be received by those who acknowledge both the Deity and the Humanity of Christ. We recognise several elements in this sorrow. 1. There was *personal* sorrow when He wept tears of grief, when there escaped Him groans of disappointment. 2. The sorrow of *sympathy* and *compassion*, when He grieved for His friends, for His nation, for the disobedient and rebellious, for the sin-stricken race of man. 3. Christ's was *progressive* sorrow. It gathered thick as a cloud above His head as His ministry advanced. It culminated with life's close in Gethsemane and on Calvary.

II. *How it came to pass that the Lord Jesus was a Man of Sorrows.* 1. It was through His *contact* with sin and with sinners,—to a nature like His how especially painful and distressing. 2. It was also through His *conscious bear*

ing of sin; the sins of the whole world having been laid upon Him and assumed by Him. 3. He suffered through His *conflict* with sin, He endured the contradiction of sinners. Wounds and scars were inflicted upon His sensitive nature in this appalling battle.

III. *With what intent the Lord Jesus deigned to become a Man of Sorrows.* 1. That He might be the *representative man*, the Head of an afflicted humanity. 2. That He might be the *Saviour*—perfect through sufferings, as the Captain of our salvation. 3. That He might be a *sympathising High Priest*, touched with a feeling of our infirmities. His sorrows were to avert our woes and to procure our bliss.—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. p. 78.

I. The language of our text does not describe the case of one who encountered only the ordinary or the average amount of the trials which belong to human life. There is implied in it a pre-eminence in sorrow, a peculiarly deep experience of grief.

II. Of all the many griefs of the Divine Redeemer in His human life, there was not one which He Himself either needed or deserved to bear.

III. All the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, so painful, and so entirely unnecessary and undeserved on His own account, were endured with unwavering fortitude. (α)

IV. In all the griefs and sorrows which the blessed Saviour suffered, His mind was chiefly occupied with the good results in which His sufferings were to issue (Heb. xii. 2).

PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. If even the Son of God, when on earth, was a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief, we certainly should not think it strange that days of trial are appointed unto us.

2. If our blessed Lord felt keenly what He suffered, and was even moved to tears, we need not reproach ourselves because we deeply feel our trials, and cannot but weep in the fulness of our grief (P. D. 3287).

3. If Christ was a willing sufferer, deliberately choosing to suffer for the good of others, we surely should consent to suffer for our own advantage (H. E. I. 158; P. D. 3239, 3246)

4. If our blessed Lord made less account of what He suffered than of the good results which were to follow, it is wise at least in us to do the same (H. E. I. 2204–2221, 3678–3704).—*Ray Palmer, D.D.: The National Preacher*, vol. xxxviii. pp. 25–34.

(α) He was to the last moment of His life a willing sufferer. He was moved, deeply moved by sorrow; and He wept—wept often, it is probable. Tears are the innocent, and many times the sweet relief of the distressed. He dreaded suffering, too, like others, when He saw its near approach, and felt the instinctive desire to be saved from its bitter pangs; but, notwithstanding this, His fortitude was steady and unyielding; so that He met the hour of anguish, at all times, with a noble constancy of soul. When human nature, almost overborne by the weight of anguish, prompted the petition, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," the unbending strength of moral purpose, the enduring energy of perfect self-devotion, at once dictated the addition: "Father, Thy will be done" Even His last mournful exclamation under the hidings of the Father's face, in the last affecting scene on Calvary, is no exception to the truth of these remarks; for that was only a testimony to the world of the extremity of the anguish which its Redeemer consented to endure, and not at all the utterance of faltering or failing resolution.—*Ray Palmer.*

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR.

liii. 3–5. *He is despised and rejected of men, &c.*

A deliverer was expected. "The desire of all nations." What sort of personage was He? He was a disappointment, and was treated as one. For He was a suffering Saviour. Yet this is His glory.

I. A SUFFERING SAVIOUR IN PROPHECY.

The text predicts this. Picture out the kind of career indicated in the text. Men admire grandeur, despise poverty and suffering. But He was

"a man of sorrows;" and it is quite possible that He carried in His countenance the marks of inward suffering. Prophecy required that He should be a sufferer: this chapter, and many other passages. There are in fact two classes of prophecies—the one represents Him as a sufferer, the other as a reigning King. If He had not suffered, the proof of His Messiahship would have been fatally defective (Luke xviii. 31–34, xxiv. 26, 27, 44–46; Acts iii. 18).

II. A SUFFERING SAVIOUR IN HISTORY.

"Behold the man," said Pilate. Was He not rejected, despised, "a man of sorrows"? Fine natures feel such a position as that in which He was placed, coarse natures do not. And there were deeper causes of sorrow than man could fathom. The prospect immediately before Him was sorrowful enough. He had said, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour." "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." He had agonised in the garden. He had sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. He had cried out for the cup to pass away. He had felt the bitterness of betrayal. He had been tried by the Jewish court. He had been crowned and scourged by the Roman soldiery. Ere many hours had passed He felt the shame, the pain, the fever of crucifixion. He was forsaken of God. His heart broke. His sufferings ended only with His life.

Such were the facts of history. Such were the requirements of prophecy. Thus—1. Scripture was fulfilled. 2. His Messiahship was proved. 3. Satisfaction was made for sin. Repentance by itself is no satisfaction for past sin (H. E. 1. 4225–4228). Nor is reformation. Nor is there any force within man's depraved nature that would impel to repentance. Therefore atonement is needed by another: Himself suitable as being Divine, human, sinless (ver. 4).

Such is the Saviour. Thus He suffered. Measuring love by the labour it is willing to undergo, the suffering it is willing to endure, the sacrifices it is willing to make, does the love of Christ burn in our hearts with intensity such as might be expected from our obligations to Him?

Have we indeed all received Him? Do not some, like the Jews, despise and reject Him? Reflect on this. 1. Its *ingratitude*. 2. Its *presumption*. In effect it says that God hath done an unnecessary thing in giving His Son: because the end could have been gained without it. Or, that the personal acceptance of Christ, though required in the Gospel, is an unnecessary requirement: because the salvation will be given without it. 3. Its *rebelliousness*. It is determined love of sin and resistance of God.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The sufferings of Christ must always be the main subject of the believer's thought, for no other can compare with this either in the intensity, the universality, or the duration of its interests. Strangers may think the Cross repulsive, for it is to the Greeks foolishness; but to believers it is a revelation of the power and the goodness of God. "We preach Christ crucified," says St. Paul, and from his day unto our own "Christ crucified" is the only foundation of hope, the only rock of faith, and the only bulwark against death. No wonder, then, that the absorbing enthusiasm of Christianity has been proved able to break mighty empires in pieces, and to subdue to itself the fiercest of human passions! Neither is this a subject of merely local interest. Moses might be compared to one of those desert chiefs whose very name is unheard in civilised lands, but Christ rather resembles those majestic conquerors who have aspired after a universal and enduring kingdom. Not Jerusalem, or Rome, but all the races of mankind, are ransomed by His death. Of this theme the Church will never weary, for, so long as there is a sorrow to heal, a temptation to conquer, or a sin to pardon—so long, in fact, as man

continues to be man, so long will there be need of Jesus and the Resurrection. No advancement of knowledge or civilisation can atone for the want of a Saviour. Now that same Saviour on whom we trust was also the hope of the ancient prophets. We look back on an accomplished fact, and they looked forward to a glorious promise.

I. THE SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD'S LIFE. The sorrows of our Saviour's life are in some respects more completely above our sympathy than those of His death; for, while we can understand the pang of the nail or the thorn, we cannot so easily realise His mental or moral sorrows. Yet these latter are not to be overlooked. There was,

1. *Our Lord's loneliness.* Loneliness is the inevitable penalty of greatness. Our Lord's loneliness may seem unimportant if we look only at His divinity, but He was as perfectly man as He was truly God. Whatever, therefore, is painful to sinless man was equally painful to Christ. Now no proof is needed that man hates to be alone. How lonely was His life! A few friends gathered round Him for a time, but forsook Him in His utmost need. Burdened with the world's redemption, He was too great and high for human sympathy. The source of all kindness, and the Creator of all families, yet of Him we are compelled to say, "He hath trodden the wine-press alone." (See p. 478.)

2. *His uninterrupted self-denial.* No doubt an accomplished act of self-denial always produces satisfaction. The very nature of self-denial requires that the painful feelings predominate, otherwise the act would be self-indulgence. What life, then, can compare with the life of Christ? Whatever is pleasant He put far from Him, and whatever is painful He took as His own. Christ lived in sorrow because sorrow was His own free choice. Yet we may gladly remember the suffering Saviour. A Redeemer who lived in pomp and honour, amid the palaces of the state and the triumphs of nations, would be too grand for ordinary men; but when we see Him walking in weariness and in pain, or bitterly mourning at the tomb of a friend, or forsaken by the chosen twelve, then we remember that He was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh."

3. *Our Lord's purity and compassion.* It may not at first be obvious that the purity of our Lord's nature should produce sorrow; and yet, when we consider that He gave Himself up to the battle against impurity, we may conceive how He would shrink from contact with it. Contrast the splendid purity of that palace which He forsook, with that foul and loathsome dungeon of pollution which He entered, God's holiness with our corruption, and then judge whether it was a small thing for Christ to live among men. Sin troubles only the pure, but sorrow appeals to all. Such an emotion always filled our Saviour's breast. He saw all men, of every race and age, involved in one common ruin, &c. At last the burden of compassion became too heavy even for Him to bear, and He longed for the relief of the shame and agony of the cross (Luke xii. 50).

4. *The ingratitude and opposition of the Jews.* Though no comparison can fully illustrate this subject, yet suppose that, when Satan's host was cast down from heaven, a blessed spirit compassionated the awful ruin; suppose that, from the sacred light above, he journeys to the guilty darkness below, and there, by his own keen sorrow, he expiates the sin of the lost; yet suppose also that, while this strong spirit was kindling hope even in hell, all the spirits of the lost should agree to curse and torment their benefactor. "Impossible," you cry; "impossible even in hell!" Alas! it was possible on earth. Count up the miracles of mercy, and then consider how soon indifference became ingratitude, and ingratitude ripened into opposition. We may blush for our humanity. Those who yesterday ate the sacred bread, to-day cry, "Crucify Him!" &c.

II. THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD'S DEATH. We may not press too closely into that mysterious scene of woe. It is rather a topic for thought than speech.

1. *Our Lord's death was bitter and painful.* "They pierced," says the prophet, "my hands and my feet;" and, adds Isaiah, "He was smitten of God and afflicted." For six hours He hung upon the cross. Yet doubtless His sorest sufferings were mental, for He bore all the sins of all the world. In some mysterious manner, the debt which we could never pay through all eternity, He paid in a moment of time. Yet surely He was supported by Divine consolation? Alas, no! He who stands in my place stands beneath offended justice; and hence, perhaps, that strange, mysterious cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Yet, as these sufferings were extreme, so the result of them was excellent. By them He purchased everlasting redemption for man; and equally by them He inspires us with a holy horror of sin.

2. *Our Lord's death was apparently that of a criminal.* He was numbered with the transgressors. "We did esteem Him judicially smitten," says Isaiah, and, adds the Evangelist, "He was crucified between two thieves." The vilest wretch who dies to-day, amid the horrors of a public execution, is kindlier treated, meets with more sympathy and less contempt than did the Lord of glory. Consider, then, the innocence of His character, and the apparent guilt of His death. How great the contrast!

3. *Thus our Lord died amid ignominy and contempt.* The Romans considered crucifixion to be a doom too base for any but the vilest slaves, &c.

There is no need to add that these sorrows were the revelation of eternal love. "Herein is love," herein and nowhere else is it so affectingly, so unequivocally proved, "Not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."—*Bamford Burrows: The Methodist Recorder*, March 29, 1877.

Sympathy with the Suffering.

(A Hospital Sunday Sermon.)

liii. 4. "*Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.*"

This Scripture is quoted in 1 Pet. ii. 24, as expressing the Saviour's substitutionary suffering on the cross. It is quoted in Matt. viii. 17, as fulfilled by the Saviour's healing miracles. It thus at first sight presents a considerable difficulty, which, however, disappears when you remember three things. First, that the scope of this chapter is to exhibit the suffering Saviour. Second, that the thing in the mind of Matthew was the Saviour's intense sympathy, which took up into Himself the sorrows and sufferings of our fallen nature. Third, that some Scriptures are capable of many fulfilments. A passage may have one main meaning, yet that meaning may contain others within itself, as a tube may contain several tubes, or as a rose may contain many leaves overlapping each other. There is thus in the whole work of Jesus a twofold fulfilment of this important prophecy

I. That which consisted in His atoning death for sin.

In this sense He took the infirmities and sicknesses of our souls. In the phraseology of the Old Testament the bearing of sin is equivalent to the consequences of its guilt. The Lord Jesus Christ was the great sin-bearer. He took upon Him our nature, not only that He might adequately represent humanity and be an example, but especially that He might bear the sin of man in His death on the cross (1 Pet. ii. 24; 2 Cor. v. 21). When you look for a reason why the Son of God became a man and was crucified, you cannot find it in any breach of law by Him, nor in the circumstance that He had provoked the authorities, and fallen under their power. You can only find it in the fact that His death was the atoning satisfaction for sin, on the ground of which its penal consequences can be removed from the sinner; and

in the further fact that it is the fullest condemnation of sin, and the most powerful motive to abandon it. Thousands have believed this, and found peace to their consciences; and not only so, they find that faith in Him crucifies sin, and inspires them with the ardent desire to be free from its power. So that our text contains the three ideas essential to the Saviour's work: viz., 1. Suffering. 2. Substitution. 3. Salvation.

But this is not the only fulfilment of this prophecy. There is

II. THAT WHICH CONSISTED IN HIS FEELING FOR, AND HELP IN, MEN'S BODILY SUFFERINGS.

We must bear in mind the close connection between the body and the soul. Sin has affected both. While the seat of sin is the soul, the body, as its instrument, participates in the sin. It suffers in consequence of sin. In Scripture all bodily infirmity, suffering, death in man, is traced to sin. The disease of leprosy was selected by Moses as the representation of this truth. The exclusion of the leper from the congregation, and the ceremonies connected with his re-admission, marked and kept this great truth in memory.

It was therefore fitting that He who came to destroy death and sin should take into His view and into His heart, not only the spiritual, but the physical aspects of the case He had undertaken. Man's completed redemption will be the redemption of the body at the resurrection. The final state of the glorified is one in which there shall be no more sorrow, nor sickness, nor pain, nor death. How then could He who came to accomplish that redemption be indifferent to the sufferings in which He saw a part of the misery He came to remove?

In this view, what a splendid career was His life on earth! There have been philanthropists, like Howard, and Wilberforce, and Clarkson, who have had compassion on the prisoner and the slave. But who has devoted Himself with such fulness of consecration and such forgetfulness of self? Whoever, in so short a time, accomplished so much, left such a mark behind Him in the grateful memories of those whom He had relieved and cured, and whose dark lives He had made bright by His healing touch? He could not see suffering without compassion, and He could not feel compassion without stretching out His hand to help.

In those works of beneficence He furnished a pre-intimation of the spirit that would characterise His religion. We have heard something about the religion of humanity. Men are to live for man rather than for God. Its practical effect will be nothing, because it takes away the motive power that would impel man to live for man. Nothing but the love of God creates the love of man. The idea is as old as Christianity; it is a part of Christianity, it is essential to it, it is borrowed from it. One of the first principles of practical Christianity is that "none of us liveth to himself." "We live unto the Lord," and our life to Him is manifested in living and working for our fellow-men. Christianity inspires its votaries with the desire to communicate it to others. But that is not all. In keeping with the idea that Christ has redeemed the human body as well as the human soul, it interests itself in everything that concerns the wellbeing of man. Wherever it is extended, it improves his material condition. The savage becomes civilised. Slavery has been abolished. Even war has yielded to its influence. There is greater reluctance to engage in it; restrictions are imposed on its conduct; benevolent ministers attend friend and foe alike on the battlefield. Christianity leads men to use their material opportunities to the best advantage; yet it does not encourage its votaries to turn coldly from those who have been unsuccessful in the race of life. The numberless institutions of the present day for the improvement of the material condition of the people, as a rule owe their origination and perpetuation to the humanising influence of Christianity.

And in these works of beneficence the Lord Jesus Christ furnished an example to His followers in all ages. Individually and personally they are called upon. They are to interest themselves in the spiritual and temporal wellbeing of man, as He did. They cannot work miracles. But they can perform the daily duties of life. Husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, servants, can imitate His consideration for others. There can be the visit to the sick and the troubled. The poor cannot perhaps be lifted out of their poverty; but they can be helped in it. It is of advantage to do such work personally as far as possible. But much of it can only, at least can best, be done by means of public institutions and societies. Thus the sending the gospel to the heathen. Thus ministration to the sick and wounded is most effectual by means of hospitals. Catch the spirit of Jesus.

The example is enforced by the unparalleled sacrifices He made to gain His end. Think of the number and variety of diseases and sufferings, and do what you can, like Jesus, to heal.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The Mystery of our Lord's Sufferings.

liii. 4, 5. *We did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, &c.*

No man, free from bias and prejudice, can fail to see that in this chapter the Messiah—the suffering Messiah—is referred to. As little can any open-minded man fail to see, that in it the vicarious nature of Messiah's sufferings is declared. He is the sinless One who bears on His own heart and life the burden of the sins of others. He is the sent One who bears that burden as God, and for Him.

The pathway of shame which the humbled Saviour trod comes into our view. We see the thick clouds gathering over Him. We hear men reviling the seemingly helpless sufferer. We read the stricken heart that for a moment even fears the Divine forsaking. We catch the dying cry, "It is finished!" and the last heart-breaking sigh. And through the blinding, sympathising tears we read, "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities."

The mystery of Christ's sufferings! It may be profitable for us to meditate upon them, asking, What is man's explanation of them and what is God's?

I. The mystery of Christ's sufferings,—man's explanation of it. "We did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." And it is impossible to say that this is other than a fair view to take from man's position and with man's knowledge.

1. *Try and realise the process of thought in a man who was told of Christ's sufferings and death, but had no knowledge of His personal innocence.* To such a man it would be plain that God has established an immediate connection between sin and suffering. Throughout His wide domain God "by no means clears the guilty." The suffering often comes openly, so that men may see it; sometimes it comes only to the man's spirit; but it always comes. Upon the basis of this constant union between sin and suffering, the man might fairly argue that there must be a connection between suffering and sin, so that wherever he saw suffering he would suspect that sin was its cause (H. E. I. 4490, 4603–4610).

The discipline of chastisement through which the Christian passes may seem opposed to this view; it is only, however, lifting it up into a higher plane, and treating it with qualifying considerations. All discipline carries the idea of punishment; it is the recognition of some evil in the person on whom it rests. Since then the man is prepared to find sin wherever he finds suffering, he will be ready to explain the mystery of Christ's

sufferings by saying, "Christ had sinned." And such a man, looking upon Christ as condemned by law, would further recognise *God's hand in His sufferings.* For if human laws are to gain the respect of men, they must be regarded as the expression of God's law. It was perhaps thus that the Jewish bigots thought of the Nazarene malefactor. Yet we know, we feel that this explanation of the mystery of our Lord's sufferings is insufficient and incorrect. Worthless—nay, wholly wrong—if He be the spotless Lamb of God.

2. *Try to realise the process of thought in a man who has some knowledge of Christ's life, and especially of His personal innocence.* Such a man might say, Christ's sufferings were a special and extraordinary Divine judgment. "He was smitten of God;" His death was a sad calamity. Calamity, that is, suffering of which the sufferer's sin is not the immediate cause, is no such uncommon thing in the world. The tower of Siloam fell. The sin was Pilate's; it did not belong to those whose blood was poured forth. They were smitten of God. The world has known many instances in which the innocent has been treated as the guilty Such cases are mysteries; man can only say of the sufferers—"Smitten of God." In the case of Christ, this, too, is insufficient; it is but the beginning of an explanation. A calamity! Yes, but only a seeming calamity, seeing that by dying He conquered death. Man cannot of himself explain the mystery of Christ's sufferings.

II. THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS—GOD'S EXPLANATION OF IT. Notice—

1. That God sustains man's view, that the sufferings of Christ *were His appointment:* but He further declares that they were an unusual, and altogether singular appointment. They were the voluntary fulfilment of a Divine decree; the carrying out to its completion, whatever that might involve, of a Divine mission (John viii. 42, iv. 34, vi. 38). God the Father gave extraordinary witness to Him as His Son and Messenger (Mark ix. 7); ancient prophecy represented Christ as saying, "Lo, I come," &c. (Ps. xl. 7, 8); and apostles firmly declare, "We have seen, and do testify," &c. (1 John iv. 14). The direct connection of the life-work and the sufferings of Jesus with the redeeming plan and purpose of God, must be anxiously and watchfully maintained. The question of surpassing interest to us is, "What does *God* think of it all? How does it all stand related to His purposes of grace?"

2. God's explanation declares that Christ's sufferings *bore no relation whatever to His own guilt.* The text gives an explanation which excludes all others. If He had sinned, it is plain that He must have come under the condemnation of the Divine law, and must have been occupied with bearing the penalties of His own sin. But Christ suffered as the representative or substitute for others; His sufferings were wholly "vicarious;" borne in carrying out the great work He had undertaken, of delivering us from the penalty and the power of sin, and securing for us eternal peace with God. This is God's wonderful solution of the question, "How shall man be just with God?"

CONCLUSION.—In the restoration of man to the Divine favour we can recognise three stages. 1. A loving purpose towards man cherished in the deep heart of the Holy Father. 2. That Divine and loving purpose effectually wrought out by God's well-beloved and only begotten Son. 3. The voluntary and hearty acceptance, by the long-sought children, of the redemption thus gloriously wrought for them. The third stage is yet incomplete. For the love of God does not—perhaps we should say *cannot*—save you against your will. But is it so, can it be so, that you have no will to be saved? Put out the hand of faith. For "all we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."—*Rev. Robert Tuck, B.A.: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. xiv. pp. 8–10.

(*Sunday School Address.*)

Compare the progress and the unfolding clearness of the Old Testament prophecies of Messiah, to a picture which takes many hands and long years to paint. Picture one man beginning by putting in the bare outline; then another and another comes, and makes the outline more and more complete and clear. Then others come and paint in the figure, form, and dress; and yet others the features and expression of the face. When the picture is complete, behold, it is Jesus of Nazareth: the suffering Saviour.

I. *The suffering Saviour.* Dwell on the terms in which His sufferings are detailed (see pp. 477–483). Carefully point out that He suffered more in His mind and heart than in His body.

II. *The suffering Saviour misunderstood.* By those who only look on the surface. By all who have no personal conviction of sin.

III. *The mystery of the suffering Saviour revealed.* It was vicarious suffering, borne according to the will of God, and borne for us.

IV. *The glorious results won by a suffering Saviour.* Man's redemption. His own eternal joy. The triumph of God's love over man's sin.—*Sunday School Addresses*, New Series, p. 6157.

The Sufferings of Christ.

liii. 5. *But He was wounded for our transgressions, &c.*

To any one who seriously contemplates the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ, three things suggest themselves as requiring explanation. 1. *An innocent man suffers.* All testimonies agree as to the purity and perfectness of the life of Jesus. There is a certain violence done to our sense of justice, when we see Him who boldly demanded, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" and to whose character the Roman judge bears unqualified witness, undergoing the double agonies of an iniquitous trial and a shameful death. 2. *The death of Jesus is the apparent defeat and destruction of one who possessed extraordinary and supernatural powers.* For Him, whose word could still a tempest, eject a devil, raise the dead, to have escaped the power of the Sanhedrim and of the soldiery would surely have been easy (Matt. xxvi. 53). In the suffering of a person so mighty, there is an intellectual inconsistency quite as remarkable as the moral inconsistency already noted. 3. *This apparent defeat and ruin, instead of hindering the progress of His work, became at once, and in all the history of the progress of His doctrine has been emphatically, the instrument whereby a world is conquered.* The death of Jesus has not been mourned by His followers, has never been concealed, but rather exulted in and prominently set forward as that to which all men must chiefly look, if they would regard Christ and His mission aright. Here, again, is a difficulty for rationalism to overcome. The innocent suffers as if guilty, the mighty is seized as if in helpless weakness, the shame and the failure result in glory and completest success. What is the philosophy of this? We ask impatiently for the explanation of the wonder. Has any ever been given which approaches the Divinely-revealed meaning supplied to us by our text, "He was wounded," &c.?

We learn here, **I. That the sufferings of Jesus Christ resulted from our sins.** Whether absolutely and universally suffering is the result of sin, we need not now inquire. Two things, at least, are certain: a large amount of suffering is the direct consequence of sin, and it is the habit of men to associate the suffering which comes before them, either directly or indirectly, with sin. Broken law everywhere brings unhappiness, pain, and death.—Now, the sufferings of Jesus could not result from His sin, for He was sinless. What He endured was not in accordance with His deserts. He became the passive recipient of what was laid

upon Him.—Much of this we may see: the sin of the people who refused Him, of the leaders who conspired against Him, of the judges who condemned Him. And inasmuch as these represent mankind, inasmuch as there is a corporate unity among all men, inasmuch as the sin of each is itself only an expression and even an outcome of the sin of all the individual specific wrongs against Jesus, and finally, inasmuch as these sins are being repeated by *every* man—wherever we find refusal of the good, blind and wilful rejection of truth, unfaithfulness to duty and right, ingratitude, craven fear, selfishness and pride—there is a profound meaning, even upon the plane of a merely human interpretation, in the words of the prophet, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." It was sin, human sin, our sin, which slew Jesus (P. D. 459).

II. That the sufferings of Jesus were related to the Divine law. Such an analysis of the sufferings of Christ as we have already indicated may be accepted by the inquirer, but it would suggest the further question, Does not this suffering of the innocent reflect upon the law and power of God? The presence of evil and sin everywhere around us is itself a great and awful mystery; but that the most terrible manifestation of evil should be found in the sufferings of the highest being ever revealed to man—this only adds to the horror of the mystery, and envelops our moral nature, the government of God, and God Himself, in a thicker darkness. Ought such a scene to be possible in a world where goodness is supreme? Either God is careless of the right, or indifferent to suffering, or powerless to prevent either the wrong or the result of it. Such must be the conclusion, if the foregoing analysis be final.

But there is an alternative. God may have permitted, nay, even ordained, the sufferings of His Son. In the sacred unity of their nature, the suffering and death of Jesus may be a part of the will and purpose of the Godhead. That it is so, man can never know unless God reveals it. But what if God has revealed it? What if there be a still deeper meaning in the cross and the grave of Jesus, and that thereby God re-enacts His broken law, reveals the exceeding and awful wickedness of sin, and sets up a vindication of law as against wilfulness and sin more splendid than of nature, more powerful than that of conscience, more persuasive than that which thundered from Sinai? What are the facts? Divine law broken by human sin. Divine mercy willing to pardon, but not by a mere remission—a letting off. The sin of man would have been repeated in such a forgiveness by a God as careless of His law as man was disobedient to it. But behold the Son of God cometh. He meets and overcomes it, obeys law completely, perfectly, sets up a life of surpassing beauty and sweetness, nobler than law itself, and yet suffers and dies—at once the fulfiller of law and the victim of sin—in His obedience illustrating the former, and in His death condemning the latter. Now mercy is free. Mercy herself through Jesus Christ is highest justice. Forgiveness by His grace is not the suspension, the destruction of law, but it is the union of law and love—it is love arrayed in garments more awful than those of law, it is law sweetened and beautified by the lineaments of love. Pardon is declared, mercy is extended, forgiveness spoken, and we know not what words can better set forth the blessed truth than the expression of the prophet, "The chastisement making for our peace was upon Him."

III. That the sufferings of Jesus became remedial of human sinfulness. A consideration of our Lord's death which placed it only in its historic relation, as one of the facts of the sad history of human wretchedness, and in its objective relation to the re-establishment of Divine law and the procuring of a free course for mercy, is wholly insufficient. In the death of Jesus there is a moral significance in respect of human character and life altogther unique. Its influence upon man's

heart and conduct is incalculable—indeed so great that many regard only these sides of it and neglect the Divine aspect altogether, and refer to this as a result and outcome of the former.

The elevation of our Lord's nature, especially as it comes out in the midst of His sufferings, would of itself have been a mighty force for the amelioration of all who contemplated it. All greatness ennobles, and when it is the greatness of the good and the gentle, the heroism of love and the power of self-sacrifice, the soul of man not only admires, but is inspired, emulates the example and joins in a holy fellowship. But Christ's death was the death of one who loved men, and whose love is revealed to us by that wisdom which alone could fathom it, as being personal and individual. Christ was not a mere philanthropist, but before His infinite intelligence every man stood separate and alone; in His infinite heart every man had a place. Hence His sufferings were sufferings for *me*, for *you;* His death was in my *place*, in *yours* (P. D. 456).

We find that in Him there gathers not only goodness, patience, all the virtues of which man is capable, there exhibited through hostility and even unto death, but there is love—a personal, direct, and individual love—such as would have been equal to all the claim made upon it, to all the burden which it had to bear even if there were only one soul in the world to be redeemed, and that mine or yours. Let this be realised by each man, and see how his spirit will be affected by that love of Christ. What a price for righteousness! What a hindrance to sin! What a discipline, a culture, is here! How life will be inspired, action directed, victory assured for him who lives with the ever-present thought of the love of Christ! Thus will the sinful character be changed, the wounds be healed, a new heart given, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit who applies these "things of Christ," the soul is regenerated, sanctified, and at last glorified in the perfect blessedness and holiness of heaven. This is what we need within ourselves—this healing grace; and this is what the prophet declares Messiah will bestow, for "with His stripes we are healed."

With these thoughts, let us surround the holy table of the Lord. Here is the broken body and the shed blood. Here are we reminded of the sufferings which yet glorified law and obtained forgiveness, and are evermore the power of the love which heals and strengthens and at last completely saves.—*H. D. Bevan, D.D.*

These sufferings constituted the price which the incarnate Son of God had voluntarily engaged to pay for human redemption: they were the atonement due for the accumulated sins of a guilty world, and were required by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

I. THEIR NATURE.

To form an adequate conception of our Redeemer's sufferings, we must contemplate Him as forsaken and unsupported, save only by the consciousness of perfect innocence; surrounded by a whole nation of implacable enemies; betrayed by His own treacherous companion; insulted and beaten by a ferocious multitude; dragged, on a perjured accusation, before the judgment-seat; affixed to the accursed tree, where, for six tedious hours of mortal agony, He hangs suspended from His own quivering flesh. Bitter, however, as were the physical sufferings of our Lord, the peculiar agony of His passion did not result solely from that cause. It was the mental anguish that He endured during that awful period; the overwhelming consciousness of God's anger; the total absence of all aid or consolation from above; the feeling of utter desertion both by God and man, when He approached the tremendous conflict with all the powers of darkness;—it was the pressure of that enormous mass of transferred sin which, as the representative of mankind, He had undertaken to bear. Physically, His sufferings did

not differ materially from those of that noble army of Christian heroes who followed His steps to martyrdom and glory; but they had no desertion of the Divine grace and favour to lament —no load of imputed corruption to weigh them down. The Prince of Martyrs felt the unnatural load of His polluted burden; He tottered under its enormous weight, but no assisting hand stretched out to help; alone He had to undergo the tremendous ordeal, without support from His Father, without the comfort and companionship of the Holy Spirit.

Thus was the "Messiah cut off, but not for Himself." He owed no submission to death, having never fallen under the dominion of sin. The punishment which *He* underwent was due to *us;* they were *our* iniquities for which He was wounded and slain; for our sakes He became as it were the paschal lamb, "sprinkling His blood" for our salvation; for us He consented to be treated like the scapegoat in the wilderness, and to bear in His own person the iniquities of us all. How bitter the ingredients of the cup of which He drank! The annals of mankind can furnish no parallel to the immensity of His sufferings.

II. THEIR OBJECT.

Mankind had been created perfect, but had fallen from their original uprightness into a state of degradation most offensive to the holiness of God. He could not behold His creation, once so happy and sinless, thus corrupted and depraved, without just indignation. Yet in the midst of His wrath He remembered mercy; and, because mankind were too widely alienated from Himself ever to be rescued from the lamentable consequences of the Fall by any exertions of their own, He devised the wonderful expedient of vicarious atonement, by which, through the personal intervention of some friendly mediator, full and perfect satisfaction might be offered, in man's behalf, to the offended holiness and plighted truth of Heaven. No one could be found sufficient for this purpose but His only SON, who assumed the nature and liabilities of those whom He desired to rescue from destruction. The object for which He came into the world was to redeem mankind — by undergoing the full amount of punishment that had been incurred; by rescuing all that might believe on Him from the dominion of sin and Satan; and by opening a fountain for sin and uncleanness, capable of removing pollution from the entire human race.

These merciful purposes had long been intimated by Divine revelation, and the expectation kept alive by a series of prophecies. The necessity of a *real* expiation was prefigured by the early institution of blood offerings, in which an innocent victim became an atonement for the sins of the sacrificer, and was supposed to draw down the divine wrath upon itself, and to avert it from the offender. Corresponding intimations were made in all the other types and ordinances of the law, especially in the driving forth of the sin-laden scapegoat into the wilderness, and in the entrance into the holy of holies of the priestly intercessor bearing the blood of sacrifice (Heb. ix. 7, 11, 12).

III. THEIR SUFFICIENCY.

The entire value of our Redeemer's mediation, the whole efficacy of His atonement, depended on His total freedom from sin. The smallest deviation from the perfection of righteousness would have entirely disqualified Him for the office of a Saviour, by degrading Him to the very condition of those whom He purposed to save. He would have become in His own person a debtor to Divine justice, and thus would have required a surety for Himself, instead of becoming a surety for others. But the spotless holiness of the expiation was secured by His inseparable relation to the Deity; and, for the same reason, a redundancy of merit accrued to Him which rendered the atonement He made abundantly efficacious for the redemption of the world (1 Pet. ii. 22–24; H. E. I. 377–38].

The surest proof of the entire sufficiency of our Lord's sufferings and death as an offering for sin consists in His resurrection from the dead. This was the sign to which He had previously referred the Jews as an evidence of His divine power (John ii. 19–21); and it was, doubtless, essential that He who claimed a victory over death should exhibit in His own instance the first fruits of that victory by raising Himself from the dead. Had He failed in rescuing Himself, His ability to save others might reasonably have been questioned; but having exercised that power in His own case, much more is He able to raise others from the death of sin to the new life of righteousness and glory. The sufficiency of our Lord's atonement is still further evident in His public and triumphant ascension into heaven, and in His subsequent fulfilment of the promise that after His departure He would send the Holy Spirit unto them. —*George Pellew, D.D.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 107–124.

Consider I. THE NATURE OF THE REDEEMER'S SUFFERINGS. *Physical*, but not chiefly so. The physical sufferings of many of the martyrs were greater than His. *Mental*, and these are harder to endure than physical sufferings. Minds differ in their capacity for suffering; the more capacious and sensitive they are, the greater that capacity (H. E. I. 915). II. THEIR SOURCE: our sins, which He had taken upon Himself. III. THEIR ENDS. 1. That a way of salvation might be opened for all who believe. 2. That a complete triumph over the powers of darkness might be achieved, by the setting up of a kingdom that will never be destroyed (see outlines on vers. 10–12).—*C. B. Woodman: The British Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 384–393.

I. *In His body and in His soul.* Heartache is worse than headache. "The sufferings of His soul were the soul of His sufferings." II. *In His earlier and in His later years.* Of the babe—boy—man. III. *In personal endurance and by sympathy.* Sympathy with all the ills of humanity, and with the woes of individual sufferers. IV. *From all orders of being.* Men—friends, foes, neutrals; devils; GOD—withdrawal, infliction of penalty.

CONCLUSION.—Can the sufferings of Christ be explained apart from the doctrine of the atonement? Ought not the sufferings of Christ for us to draw forth our faith and love? Should not the sufferings of Christ lead us as believers to confide in His sympathy? —*G. Brooks: Outlines*, p. 79.

(*Sacramental Sermon.*)

There is nothing else which ought so to affect our hearts as the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It brings to mind all our misery, all our salvation. It places before us the august emblems of our crucified Master, and calls us to pronounce over His broken body and shed blood the sacramental vow. It is, therefore, one of the most affecting solemnities in which we shall ever be engaged till we get to heaven. Let us endeavour to prepare our hearts for it, while we attend to the two great ideas of the text—

I. It is proper to enter fully into the consideration of our sins, for unless we come to this sacrament as sinners—penitent, emptied of self—we shall fail of entering into the meaning of our ordinance, or holding communion with our Saviour.

1. *The number of our sins.* Go back to the years of your childhood and youth. Let busy memory call up from forgotten years the thousand sins which time has almost worn from the brain. As we look back on our life, recollection fails us, and well may we say with the Psalmist, "Who can understand his errors?" Surely our hearts should be affected with the number of our sins. Had we sinned but once, the law of God would have condemned us, and we could not have justified our-

selves. But we have sinned times without number! eternity alone can calculate their amount!

2. *Their enormity.* The undisturbed sinner, moving on in his career of carelessness, does not realise the great evil of the sins he commits. He thinks of transgression against God as a trifle, &c. We should measure the enormity of our sin by the evil of it; and the evil of it by the majesty of the Deity we have offended, and by the eternity of punishment which God pronounces over it (H. E. I. 4477–4490).

3. *The motives which induced us to sin.* Surely the small motives there are to sin, contrasted with the immense motives to holiness, manifest a guilt of the heart which ought to fill our souls with the deepest contrition.

4. *The effect our sins have had on others.* Sin is a contagious evil; "one sinner destroyeth much good." We are so situated in human society that we cannot avoid holding an influence over one another. Had we destroyed ourselves only, the evil would not have been so lamentable. But we have dragged others into the same gulf wherein we have so thoughtlessly precipitated ourselves! (H. E. I. 4565).

II. Penitently consider the sufferings of Jesus Christ to atone for men. "But He was wounded for our transgressions." Jesus Christ helped us when we could not help ourselves. 1. In the sacrifice of Christ the pardon of sin is secured. 2. The justice of God is satisfied. 3. An everlasting righteousness is procured for the sinner. 4. That grace which subdues the heart has been obtained.—*Ichabod S. Spencer, D.D.: Discourses on Sacramental Occasions*, pp. 178–196.

Vicarious Sacrifice.

liii. 5. *But He was wounded for our transgressions, &c.*

It is generally admitted that this prophecy refers to Christ, and if so, the vicarious nature of His sufferings and death cannot admit of reasonable dispute. If language has meaning in the text, this must be acknowledged. But there is a previous question started by scepticism, to which it is proper to reply. We maintain then—

I. That the principle of vicarious sacrifice is consistent with the Divine perfections. It has been urged that the sufferings of the innocent for the benefit of the guilty, is utterly inconsistent with perfect justice. This we deny. In doing so we are under no obligation to satisfy human scruples, for our ideas of what Divine justice really is must necessarily be very partial and imperfect, so that dogmatically to affirm what may or may not be harmonised with it, beyond what we learn expressly from Divine revelation upon the subject, is impudent presumption. It would be sufficient to know, as a matter of fact, that the law of vicarious suffering is recognised, not only in Scripture, but is also everywhere manifest in the universe.

1. *The vicarious principle is a law of physical being.* (1.) The mineral kingdom suffers for the sake of the vegetable; for the vegetable eats upon the mineral, and lives upon its destruction and conversion. (2.) The vegetable kingdom, in its turn, suffers for the sustentation of the animal. (3.) Herb-feeding races of animals die to support the life of carnivora. And geological researches show the laws of prey and death were in commission among animals before sin was introduced by our first parents. (4.) Again, vegetables and animals alike labour and suffer, and die for the benefit of their offspring. (5.) How beautifully is the vicarious principle evinced in the voluntary cheerful sufferings of the human mother for the sake of her child (H. E. I. 393–396).

2. *The vicarious principle is a law of intellectual being.* (1.) The enjoyment experienced by a reader of a masterly treatise, as its profound and brilliant

thoughts successively rise, as by enchantment, is the purchase of the wearisome vigilance, and sustained and often painful effort of the author's mind. (2.) The repasts upon which many a Christian congregation are Sabbath after Sabbath delighted, are the sweat of the preacher's brain. (3.) The civilisation we inherit with our birth, is the result of an incalculable amount of anxious, laborious, and distressing thought on the part of millions now sleeping in the dust. (4.) What privations do parents voluntarily suffer in order to secure the education of their children!

3. *The vicarious principle is a law of moral being.* (1.) It is the very soul of sympathy. Without sympathy society would lose its charm—a community of stoics. (2.) The philanthropist facing the horrors of disease and wretchedness, &c. The missionary! (3.) It is virtue which gives value to sacrifice.

A principle thus universally obtaining cannot but harmonize with the justice of the Universal Ruler. The vicarious sacrifice of Christ is the most marvellous and stupendous exemplification of a law everywhere exemplified.

II. A vicarious sacrifice of infinite merit is indispensable to human salvation.

1. *Man is found in the attitude of rebellion against God.*

2. *Divine justice cannot be sacrificed to mercy* (H. E. I. 376).

3. *Man has no means by which to commend himself to the mercy of God.* (1.) Repentance of no value without an atonement (H. E. I. 4225–4228). (2.) Man is too depraved of himself to repent (H. E. I. 4250).

4. *The only remaining source is in the vicarious principle.* (1.) The vicarious person must be able to suffer the penalty of human sin. (2.) He must have sufficient merit to procure the enlightening and sanctifying agency of a Divine worker.

III. The requirements of the vicarious principle are met in the sacrifice of Christ.

1. *His merits fully realize the Divine ideal.* (1.) He was pure through the miracle of His birth. (2.) He was righteous in the fulfilment of every requirement of law. (3.) In His official capacity He was approved by celestial voices, at His baptism and transfiguration, and with reference to His sufferings at Gethsemane and Calvary. (4.) Hence His exaltation (John xvii. 1–5; Phil. ii. 9–11).

2. *Those merits were devoted to our redemption and salvation.* (1.) This is the great doctrine of the text. (2.) The marrow of the Gospel. (3.) They have made provision for the renewal of our nature—God cannot change, and therefore we must be changed. The Holy Spirit helps us to repent and believe the Gospel, &c.

CONCLUSION.—1. Learn the absurdity of seeking salvation by works 2. Learn the obligation to aim at Christian perfection. (3.) Learn the necessity of the vicarious principle to the Christian life (Matt. xvi. 24–26 1 John iii. 16–17).—*James Alex. Macdonald: Pulpit Analyst*, vol. i. pp. 702–705.

HEALED BY HIS STRIPES.

liii. 5. *With His stripes we are healed.*

The two great things which the Spirit of Christ in the ancient prophets testified beforehand, were the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (1 Pet. i. 11, 12). And when Jesus, after His resurrection, expounded to His disciples, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself, He showed the scope and purport of them all to be that "Christ ought to have suffered, and then to enter into His glory." But in no part of the Old Testament are these two things so fully exhibited as in this chapter, from which many passages are quoted and applied to Christ in the New Testament.

I. THE SUFFERINGS OF THE MESSIAH.

II. THE CAUSE AND DESIGN OF THOSE SUFFERINGS.

III. THE BENEFIT WE OBTAIN BY THEM, AND HOW WE OBTAIN IT. "With His stripes we are healed." We are healed, 1. *Of our inattention and unconcern about divine things.* The dignity of our Lord's person, the intensity of His sufferings, and the end for which He endured them, discover that things of a spiritual and divine nature are of infinite moment. Our ignorance and unbelief respecting these things. His sufferings confirm and seal His doctrine, and show the certain truth and unspeakable importance of it, and the reasonableness of a serious study of it, of laying it to heart, and receiving it in faith.

2. *Of the disease of self-righteousness and self-confidence.* For, if our own righteousness could have saved us, and if we could safely have trusted therein, Christ needed not to have died.

3. *Of our love to sin and the commission of it.* For how can we love Him and continue the willing servants of the betrayer and murderer of the Son of God, our Saviour? How can we willingly commit sin, which is so great an evil in its own nature, that it could not be pardoned, unless expiated by the sufferings and death of the Son of God, and Lord of glory? (H. E. I., 4589, 4590).

4. *Of our love of the riches, honours, and pleasures of this world.* For how can we reasonably desire any of these in a world, where our Lord and Master "had not where to lay His head," where He "was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"?

5. *Of our self-indulgence and self-seeking.* Since His sufferings and death show that He did not seek Himself, and He died for us, that we "might not live to ourselves" (2 Cor. v. 14, 15).

6. *Of our lukewarmness and sloth.* For shall we be indifferent about, and slothful in the pursuit of what cost Him His blood?

7. *Of our cowardice and fear of suffering* (1 Pet. iv. 1).

8. *Of our diffidence and distrust with respect to the mercy of God, and His pardoning and accepting the penitent.*

9. *Of an accusing conscience and slavish fear of God, and death and hell* (Heb. ix. 13, 14).

10. *Of our general depravity and corruption of nature* (Tit. ii. 14; Eph. v. 25–27).

11. *Of our weakness and inability.* His sufferings have purchased "the spirit of might."

12. *Of our distress and misery, both present and future.* For His sufferings bear away our griefs and sorrows; they are an astonishing proof of God's infinite love to all for whom He undertook; they lay the most solid foundation for the firmest confidence and most lively hope in Him. They show that—

> "No man too largely from God's love can hope,
> If what he hopes, he labours to secure."

Joseph Benson: Sermons, vol. i. pp. 232–236.

Ever since the fall, healing has been the chief necessity of manhood. It is a great mercy for us who have to preach, as well as for you who have to hear, that the Gospel healing is so very simple. Our text describes it. These six words contain the marrow of the Gospel.

I. **These are sad words.** They are part of the mournful piece of music which might be called "the Requiem of the Messiah," 1. *Because they imply disease.* This "we" comprehends all the saints, and hence it is clear that all the saints need healing. Those who are to-day before the throne of God, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, were once defiled as the lepers who were shut out of the camp of Israel. Our fathers were fallen men, and so are we, and so will our children be. (1.) The disease of sin is of the most *loathsome* character, and it will lead to the most deadly result in due season. It is none the better because we do not feel it. It is all the worse. (2.) Sin is also a very *painful*

disease when it is known and felt. Those black days of conviction! A man needs no worse hell than his own sin and an awakened conscience.

2. *Because it speaks of suffering.* "With His stripes." I find that the word here used is in the singular, and not as the translation would lead you to suppose. I hardly know how to translate the word fully. It is read by some as "weal," "bruise," or "wound," meaning the mark or print of blows upon the skin; but Alexander says the word denotes the tumour raised in flesh by scourging. It is elsewhere translated "blueness," "hurt," and "spots," and evidently refers to the black and blue marks of the scourge. The use of a singular noun may have been intended to set forth that our Lord was as it were reduced to a mass of bruising, and was made one great bruise. (α) By the suffering which that condition indicated we are saved. Our text alludes partly to the sufferings of His body, but much more to the agonies of His soul. He was smitten in His heart each day of His life. He had to suffer the ills of Providence. He had to run the gauntlet of all mankind. Satan, too, struck at Him. Put these things all together as best you can, for I lack words with which fitly to describe these bruises.

II. These are glad words. 1. *Because they speak of the healing we need.* Understand these words. Of that *virtual* healing which was given you in the day when Jesus Christ died upon the cross. But there is an *actual* application of the great expiation to us when by faith we receive it individually. To as many as have believed in Jesus, His stripes have given the healing of forgiveness, and it has conquered the deadly power of sin. Men have tried to overcome their passions by the contemplation of death, but they have failed to bury sin in the grave; they have striven to subdue the rage of lust within their nature by meditating upon hell, but that has only rendered the heart hard and callous to love's appeals. He who once believingly beholds the mystery of Christ suffering for him shakes off the viper of sin into the fire which consumed the great sacrifice. Where falls the blood of the atonement, sin's hand is palsied, its grasp is relaxed, its sceptre falls, it vacates the throne of the heart; and the spirit of grace, and truth, and love, and righteousness, occupies the royal seat. Behold Christ smarting in your stead, and you will never despair again. It is a *universal* medicine. There is no disease by which your soul can be afflicted, but an application of the blue bruises of your Lord will take out the deadly virus from your soul.

2. *Because of the honour which the healing brings to Christ.* Child of God, if thou wouldst give glory to God, declare that thou art healed. Be not always saying, "I hope I am saved." A crucified Saviour is the sole and only hope of a sinful world.

III. These are very suggestive words. Whenever a man is healed through the stripes of Christ, the instincts of his nature should make him say, "I will spend the strength I have, as a healed man, for Him who healed me." If you know that Jesus has healed you, serve Him, by telling others about the healing medicine. Tell it to your children; tell it to your servants; leave none around you ignorant of it. Hang it up everywhere in letters of boldest type. "With His stripes we are healed."—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1068.

(α) Pilate delivered our Lord to the lictors to be scourged. The Roman scourge was a most dreadful instrument of torture. It was made of the sinews of oxen, and sharp bones were intertwisted here and there among the sinews; so that every time the lash came down these inflicted fearful laceration, and tore off the flesh from the bone. The Saviour was, no doubt, bound to the column, and thus beaten. He had been beaten before; but this of the Roman lictors was probably the most severe of His flagellations. My soul, stand here, and weep over His poor stricken body. Believer in Jesus, can you gaze upon Him without tears, as He stands before you the mirror of agonising love. He is at once fair as the lily for innocence, and red as the rose with the crimson of His own blood. As we feel the sure and blessed healing which His

stripes have wrought in us, does not our heart melt at once with love and grief. If we have ever loved our Lord Jesus, surely we must feel that affection glowing now within our bosoms.—*Spurgeon.*

I. A LAMENTABLE DISEASE ASSUMED. 1. The baneful result of transgression. 2. Universal in its prevalency. 3. Hereditary in its descent. 4. Incurable by human agency.

II. AN INFALLIBLE PHYSICIAN SPECIFIED. 1. Infinite in wisdom. 2. Impartial in attendance. 3. Ever easy of access. 4. Gratuitous in His practice.

III. THE REMEDY HE EMPLOYS. "His stripes," *i.e.* the atonement. 1. Divine in its appointment. 2. Easy in its application. 3. Universal in its adaptation. 4. Infallible in its efficacy.

IV. THE CURE EFFECTED BY IT. 1. Is now no novelty. 2. Is radical in its nature. 3. Is happy in its influences.

CONCLUSION.—This subject tends, 1. To promote humility. 2. To produce self-examination. 3. To encourage the desponding penitent. 4. To excite fervent gratitude.—*Four Hundred Sketches*, vol. ii. p. 93.

I. THE MEDICINE WHICH IS HERE PRESCRIBED—the stripes of our Saviour. I take the term "stripes" to comprehend all the physical and spiritual sufferings of our Lord, with especial reference to those chastisements of our peace which preceded rather than actually caused His sin-atoning death: it is by these that our souls are healed.

"But why?" say you. 1. Because our Lord, as a sufferer, was not a private person, but suffered as a public individual, and an appointed representative. Hence the effects of His grief are applied to us, and with His stripes we are healed. 2. Our Lord was not merely man, or else His sufferings could not have availed for the multitude who now are healed thereby.

But *healing* is a work that is carried on within, and the text rather leads me to speak of the effect of the stripes of Christ upon our characters and natures than upon the result produced in our position before God.

II. THE MATCHLESS CURES WROUGHT BY THIS REMARKABLE MEDICINE. Look at two pictures. Look at man without the stricken Saviour; and then behold man with the Saviour, healed by His stripes.

III. THE MALADIES WHICH THIS WONDROUS MEDICINE REMOVES. The great root of all this mischief, the curse which fell on man through Adam's sin, is already effectually removed. But I am now to speak of diseases which we have felt and bemoaned, and which still trouble the family of God. 1. *The mania of despair.* 2. *The stony heart.* 3. *The paralysis of doubt.* 4. *Stiffness of the knee-joint of prayer.* 5. *Numbness of soul.* 6. *The fever of pride.* 7. *The leprosy of selfishness.* 8. *The fretting consumption of worldliness.* (See also p. 494.)

IV. THE CURATIVE PROPERTIES OF THIS MEDICINE. All manner of good this divine remedy works in our spiritual constitution. The stripes of Jesus when well considered, 1. Arrest spiritual disorder. 2. Quicken all the powers of the spiritual man to resist the disease. 3. They restore to the man that which he lost in strength by sin. 4. They soothe the agony of conviction. 5. They eradicate the power of sin; they pull it up by the root; destroy the beasts in their lair: put to death the power of sin in our members.

V. THE MODES OF THE WORKING OF THIS MEDICINE. How does it work? Briefly, its effect upon the mind is this. The sinner hearing of the death of the incarnate God is led by the force of truth and the power of the Holy Spirit to believe in the incarnate God. After faith come gratitude, love, obedience, &c. (*a*)

VI. ITS REMARKABLY EASY APPLICATION. There are some *materia medica* which would be curative, but they are so difficult in administration, and attended with so much risk in their operation, that they are rarely if ever

employed; but the medicine prescribed in the text is very simple in itself, and very simply received; so simple is its reception that, if there be a willing mind here to receive it, it may be received by any of you at this very instant, for God's Holy Spirit is present to help you. How, then, does a man get the stripes to heal him? 1. He hears about them. 2. Faith cometh by hearing; that is, the hearer believes that Jesus is the Son of God, and he trusts in Him to save his soul. 3. Having believed, whenever the power of his faith begins to relax, he goes to hearing again, or else to what is even better, after once having heard to benefit, he resorts to contemplation; he resorts to the Lord's table that he may be helped by the outward signs; he reads the Bible that the letter of the word may refresh his memory as to its spirit, and he often seeks a season of quiet, &c.—Poor sinner, simply trust and thou art healed; backsliding saint, contemplate and believe again.

Since the medicine is so efficacious, since it is already prepared and freely presented, I do beseech you take it.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 834.

(a) Looking upon the "stripes" of Jesus, one may be led, 1. To think of the awfully malignant nature of sin, which would require for its expiation so great a sacrifice as that of the Son of God, and of the great depravity of his own heart in having been so destitute of love towards one so full of grace and goodness toward him. He is thus brought to tremble for his sin, and to mourn for it with deep contrition. And here is true repentance. 2. The inestimable value of the sacrifice, and the boundless love of God manifested in it, show him also that an atonement of most amply sufficient value has been offered for his sin; that the gracious God must be most mercifully disposed and willing to pardon and save him. Thus a comfortable and satisfying faith is generated in his heart. 3. The apprehension of the favouring mind in God towards him, with all the love manifested in the sufferings of Christ, disposes his heart to the love of God. 4. Seeing also that he owes his renewed being and hopes to his God and Saviour, he is ready to give himself wholly to His service. For he feels the force of the apostle's words (Rom xii. 1.; 2 Cor. 14, 15). 5. When in the service of Christ he meets with great difficulties and trials, he remembers that Christ bore for him his eternal sufferings, and thinks little of anything he can endure for Him in his short life upon earth. 6. From the contemplation of the humiliation and death of Christ flow endless streams of benevolence, readiness to give, or to do, or endure anything for our neighbour (2 Cor. viii. 9; 1 John iii. 16). 7. While that contemplation urges him to devote himself to the service of God and the promotion of his neighbour's good, it also keeps him humble in his greatest zeal, both by the example of his crucified Saviour, and also by the remembrance that his only hope of mercy rests in his coming as a worthless creature for salvation to Christ, in reliance upon His merits alone. 8. Every one who has been brought to such views of sin as the sufferings of Jesus set forth, feels himself strongly repelled, by those sufferings, from all sin. Shall he add another sin to those by which he has pierced his beloved Saviour with sorrow and pain? Here is a most cogent motive to the resistance of temptation in the true believer. And if he finds difficulty in such resistance, he remembers that his Saviour suffered crucifixion for him, and feels that he must therefore think little of "crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts," for His sake (1 Pet. iv. 1, 2).

Thus the due effect of the sufferings of Christ upon man is the entire renovation of his heart. It tends to purify him from all sin, to fashion his soul in the frame of perfect holiness, to urge him to devoted zeal in all ways of piety and charity. The wisdom of God in appointing those sufferings as the means of our salvation, is justified in the beauty of holiness to which those who duly look upon them are thus brought. As the Israelites looked upon the brazen serpent till they were healed, so let us look upon our suffering Saviour till all the disorders of our souls are remedied, and we are restored to the "spirit of love and of a sound mind."—*R. L. Cotton, M.A.: The Way of Salvation*, pp. 95–99.

Wandering Sheep.

liii. 6. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.*

Comparisons in Scripture are frequently to be understood with great limitation: perhaps, out of many circumstances, one only is justly applicable to the case. Thus, when our Lord says, "Behold, I come as a thief" (Rev. xvi. 15)—common sense will fix the resemblance to a single point, that He will come suddenly and unexpectedly.

So, when wandering sinners are compared to wandering sheep, we have a striking image of the danger of their state, and their inability to recover themselves. Sheep wandering without a shepherd are exposed, a defenceless and easy prey, to wild beasts and enemies, and liable to perish for want of pasture; for they are not able either to provide for themselves, or to find their way back to the place from whence they strayed. Whatever they suffer, they continue to wander, and if not sought out, will be lost. Thus far the allusion holds.

But sheep in such a situation are not the subjects of blame. They would be highly blameable, if we could suppose them rational creatures; if they had been under the eye of a careful and provident shepherd, had been capable of knowing him, had wilfully and obstinately renounced his protection and guidance, and voluntarily chosen to plunge themselves into danger, rather than to remain in it any longer.

Thus it is with man. 1. His wandering is rebellious. God made him upright, but he has sought out to himself many inventions (Eccl. vii. 29).

2. God has appointed for mankind a safe and pleasant path, by walking in which they shall find rest to their souls; but they say, "We will not walk therein" (Jer. vi. 16).

3. They were capable of knowing the consequences of going astray, were repeatedly warned of them, were fenced in by wise and good laws, which they presumptuously broke through.

4. When they had wandered from Him, they were again and again invited to return to Him, but they refused. They mocked His messengers, and preferred the misery they had brought upon themselves to the happiness of being under His direction and care.

Surely He emphatically deserves the name of the Good Shepherd, who freely laid down His life to restore sheep of this character.—*John Newton: Works*, p. 712.

We are like sheep, 1. *In our proneness to err.* No creature is more prone to wander and lose his way than a sheep without a shepherd. So are we apt to transgress the bounds whereby God has hedged up our way (Jer. xiv. 10). This has been manifest in every period of our life (Ps. xxv. 7, xix. 12).

2. *In our readiness to follow evil example.* Sheep run after one another, and one straggler draweth away the whole flock; and so men take and do a great deal of hurt by sad examples. Sheep go by troops, and so do men follow the multitude to do evil; what is common passeth into our practice without observation (Eph. ii. 2, 3).

3. *In our danger when we have gone astray.* Straying sheep, when out of the pasture, are in harm's way, and exposed to a thousand dangers. Oh, consider what it is for a poor solitary lamb to wander through the mountains, where, it may be, some hungry lion or ravenous wolf looketh for such a prey. Even so is it with straying men: their judgments sleepeth not; it may be in the next hour they will be delivered to destruction (Jer. vii. 6, 7; Rom. iii. 16).

4. *In our inability to return into the right way.* Other animals can find their way home again, but a strayed sheep is irrecoverably lost without the shepherd's diligence and care. "I could wander by myself, but could not return by myself" (*Augustine*).

5. *In our need of a redeemer.*

CONCLUSION.—Has the Good Shepherd brought us back? Then, 1. Let us magnify His self-sacrificing and tender mercy, in following us, and bringing us into the pastures where there is at once safety and true satisfaction.

2. Let us remember for ourselves, and preach to others, that the sheep do not fare the better for going out of the pasture. In departing from God, we turn our back upon our own happiness. The broad and easy ways of sin are pleasing to flesh and blood, but destructive to the soul. Adam thought to find much happiness in forbidden fruit, to mend and better his condition,

but was miserably disappointed. The prodigal did not fare well in the far country (Luke xv. 14).

3. Let us pray for grace that we may be watchful in the future. Alas, which of us has not sad need to make our own the Psalmist's confession and prayer (Ps. cxix. 176)? Though our hearts be set to walk with God in the main, yet there is still in them a proneness to swerve from the right way, either by neglecting our duty to God, or by transgressing against His holy commandment; against this let us be on our guard, that we may not again grieve our Good Shepherd! — *Thomas Manton, D.D.: Complete Works*, vol. iii. pp. 300–303.

We wander, I. Like sheep, without reason — the pasture was rich, the shepherd kind, the food scarce.

II. Like sheep, aimlessly. The lion prowls for food, the hart in search of water, the sheep without aim.

III. Like sheep, persistently, despising the coming shades of evening, the distant bleatings of the abandoned flock, the loss of fleece and smarting wounds.

IV. Like sheep in peril—defenceless, surrounded by dangers and foes.

V. Like sheep—sought; the Good Shepherd calls to us, "Return."—*Stems and Twigs*, second series, pp. 267.

It is acknowledged here by the person speaking, that all had, like sheep, broken the hedge of God's law, forsaken their good and ever blessed Shepherd, and wandered into paths perilous and pernicious. We are not likened to one of the more noble and intelligent animals, but to a silly sheep. All sin is folly, all sinners are fools. You will observe that the creature selected for comparison is one that cannot live without care and attention. There is no such thing as a wild sheep. The creature's happiness, its safety, and very existence, all depend upon its being under a nurture and care far above its own. Yet for all that the sheep strays from the shepherd. If there be but one gap in the hedge, the sheep will find it out. If there be but one possibility out of five hundred that by any means the flock shall wander, one of the flock will be quite certain to discover that possibility, and all its companions will avail themselves of it. So is it with man. He is quick of understanding for evil things. But that very creature which is so quick-witted to wander is the least likely of all animals to return. And such is man—wise to do evil, but foolish towards that which is good. With a hundred eyes, like Argus, he searches out opportunities for sinning; but, like Bartimeus, he is stone blind as to repentance and return to God.

The sheep goes astray *ungratefully*. It owes everything to the shepherd, and yet forsakes the hand that feeds it and heals its diseases. The sheep goes astray *repeatedly*. If restored to-day, it may not stray to-day, if it cannot; but it will to-morrow, if it can. The sheep *wanders further and further*, from bad to worse. There is no limit to its wandering except its weakness. See ye not your own selves as in a mirror?—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 925.

Diversity and Individuality in Transgression.

liii. 6. *We have turned every one to his own way.*

I. A noticeable fact.

We all resemble each other, in that we all like sheep have gone astray; but we all differ from each other, more or less, in the manner of our departure from God. There are many ways of sinning; though there be one path to heaven, there are many roads to hell. Each man chooses his own road, and the choices vary for several reasons:—

1. *Because each mind is more or less individually active.* While in an un-

enewed condition, it is active in devising means for its own gratification (Ps. lxiv. 6).

2. *Because of the diversity of our constitutions.* We see plainly that the body hath some indirect influence on the mind, and that the condition of the mind follows the constitution of the body. Moreover, Satan adapts his temptation according to what he perceives to be our constitutional tendencies (H. E. I. 4680).

3. *Because of the variety of our businesses and position in the world.* Many men are engaged in ways of sin because they best suit with their employments; it is the sin of their calling, as vainglory in a minister (1 Tim. iii. 6). So worldliness suits a man of business, or deceitfulness in his trade. Callings and businesses have their several corruptions, and into these, through the wickedness of their hearts, men slide.

4. *Because of the differences in our education.* Their education in the home as well as in school!

5. *Because of the differences in the company into which we are drawn, and of the examples that are thus set before us.* Men learn from those with whom they converse. Hence come national sins, partly, as they run in the blood, but more by way of example. Of the German we learn drunkenness and gluttony; of the French wantonness, &c. Hence also come individual sins. Hence the importance of shunning the society of the evil, and consorting only with the godly (H. E. I. 2123–2148, 4693, 4700).

II. PRACTICAL USES TO BE MADE OF THIS FACT.

1. Do not be too ready to bless yourselves, merely because the sins of others do not break out upon you; do not flatter yourselves because you do not run into the same sins that others do. The devil may take you in another snare that suiteth more with your temper and condition of life. Some are sensual, some vainglorious, some worldly, &c.; many meet in hell that do not go thither the same way. A man may not be as other men, and yet he may not be as he should be (Luke xviii. 11). For many reasons men made light of the invitation to the marriage feast (Matt. xxii. 5), but each excuse ruined. One hath business to keep him from Christ, another pleasures, another the pomps and vanities of the present world, another his superstitious observances; but each of these things obstructs the power of the truth, and the receiving of Christ into the soul. Thou hatest this or that public blemish, but what are *thy* faults? (John viii. 7.) Do not rashly censure others, and descant on their faults; look within!

2. Stop *your* way of sinning; pluck out thy right eye, cut off thy right hand (Matt. v. 29, 30). Your trial lieth there, as Abraham was tried in the call to offer up his Isaac; and David voucheth it as a mark of his sincerity (Ps. xviii. 23).

3. As we look back upon our past, and humble ourselves before God, let us penitently confess, not only the sinfulness of our nature, which we have in common with all men, but also the personal transgressions by which individually we have grieved Him.

4. As to our future, there are two things we must do. (1.) We must walk *circumspectly*. We must look carefully at and around our way, and make sure that it is also the way of God (Prov. iv. 26, 27, xiv. 12); remembering that while there are many evil paths, there is but one right one. To save us from mistake, four way marks have been mercifully given us. *First*, at the entrance of the way which leads to life everlasting there is a strait gate—so strait that we can enter it only by putting off all our sins, and giving ourselves entirely to the Lord. *Secondly*, it is a narrow way, and sometimes a very rugged way, so that much self-denial is needed to enable us to continue in it. *Thirdly*, it is a way in which you have little company (Matt. vii. 14). *Fourthly*, it is a way in which, if we look carefully, we can discern Christ's footsteps (1 Pet. ii. 21).

(2.) We must walk *prayerfully*, day

by day asking God to keep us in His way. It is pleasanter the further it is pursued, and it conducts to a glorious resting place (Prov. iii. 17).—*Thomas Manton, D.D.: Works*, vol. iii. pp. 304–308.

Guilt Confessed, Mercy Acknowledged.

liii. 6. *All we like sheep have gone astray, &c.*

Our text expresses the sentiment of those, and of those only, who are acquainted with the misery of our fallen state, feel their own concern in it, and approve of the method which God has provided for their deliverance and recovery. It contains—

I. A CONFESSION OF GUILT AND WRETCHEDNESS. "All we . . . way."

1. It is a sufficient proof of our depravity, that we prefer our own ways to the Lord's; nor can He inflict a heavier judgment upon us in this life, than to give us up entirely to the way of our own hearts.

2. There is only one right way, but a thousand ways of being wrong. If you are not following Christ, you are wandering from God. The profane and the self-righteous, the open sinner and the hypocrite, the lover of pleasure and the lover of gold, the formal Papist and the formal Protestant, though they seem to travel different roads, though they pity or censure each other, will meet at last (unless the grace of God prevent) in the same state of final and hopeless misery. Whatever character you may bear amongst men, if you have not faith and holiness, you certainly are not in the way of life (Mark xvi. 16; Heb. xii. 14).

3. As wandering sheep are liable to innumerable dangers which they can neither see nor prevent, such is our condition, until, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are stopped, and turned, and brought into the fold of the Good Shepherd.

II. AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MERCY.

Where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded. Man sinned, and Messiah suffered. "The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." On what grounds? On the ground of His voluntary substitution for sinners, as their covenant head and representative (H. E. I. 396).—*John Newton: Complete Works*, pp. 712, 713.

In few words, this text contains the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It consists of lamentation and consolation.

I. LAMENTATION.

It is a lamentation over human sinfulness. "All we . . . way." Here is sinfulness—1. *In its nature.* It is a departure from God. It is transgression of the law which defines the boundaries within which God's responsible creatures should keep. If they overleap or break them down, if they trespass into the territories beyond, they become sinners. Man has strayed from God.

2. *In its reality.* It is no ideal thing. It has passed into history. It is the sternest of living facts. From the fatal hour when the first transgression was committed, the holy God has witnessed the perpetration of sins beyond the power of any intellect other than His own to enumerate or estimate. But He numbers and estimates them with unerring accuracy.

3. *In its universality.* There are no exceptions. "All." The whole flock has followed the leader. The manner in which this is to be accounted for may be disputable, may be mysterious. The fact is neither. Scripture, history, observation, experience unite in the testimony that, with the exception of the incarnate Son of God, all have sinned.

4. *In its variety.* It does not run onwards in a straight line, as the sinfulness which appears in action would if it were merely imitation of example. The various modes of sin show that it results from a radical tendency to sin in the present state of human nature. According to peculiarities of circum-

stances, taste, temperament, men transgress. Ten thousand paths of sin strike off in as many directions, each possessing its peculiar attraction to different characters and dispositions. A lamentable ingenuity is displayed in the invention of various ways in which God may be sinned against.

5. *In its degrees.* The universality predicted of it does not imply that every one is equally sinful. Every sheep of the flock has wandered from the fold, some further than others. But let not this be made a refuge from the accusations of conscience. Because some one has committed fewer crimes than his neighbour, he persuades himself that his case calls for no alarm. He imagines that because wickedness is universal, it has overgrown the power of God to punish it; that there is something in the crowd which lessens the wretchedness of the individual; that the sin and misery of others will be greater than his own. He deems it impossible for himself to fall over the precipice, because it is not so near the point of departure as the pit which opens to engulph another who has chosen a different and swifter road to ruin. One transgression constitutes a sinner. Perhaps you underrate your own transgressions and overrate those of others. The degrees of guilt God alone understands. He sees and knows the heart's wickedness.

All, then, have gone astray. All are guilty. All need mercy. This is the lamentation of the text. But it contains also

II. CONSOLATION.

"The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." It is found in the substitution of the suffering Saviour. This truth may be—

1. *Explained.* Our iniquities have been laid on Christ the Son of God. No inferior person could bear such a load. The story of Jesus is the story of Him who has placed Himself, although innocent, in the sinner's position before the law. His death was instead of the death the sinner deserved.

2. *Confirmed.* Those who by wicked hands crucified Him were the instruments by whom the determinate counsel of God was carried out. The Lord appointed Him. He prepared the way by type, and prophecy, and history. He has accepted the atoning sacrifice. He declared it openly by the resurrection from the dead. He was thus proclaimed in the preaching of apostles (2 Cor. v. 21).

3. *Applied.* Is this consolation for you? Are you drinking life from this fountain? Have you, as a penitent sinner, applied for this mercy? Is Jesus your trust? Then your debt is paid. You owe it no longer. What you owe is gratitude and love to Jesus. Dismiss distress and fear. Enter into the liberty which shows itself in loving services.—*J. Rawlinson.*

SIN LAID ON JESUS.

liii. 6. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

The verse opens with a confession of sin *common* to all the persons intended in the verse. The confession is also *special* and particular. It is the mark of genuine repentance that while it naturally associates itself with other penitents, it also feels that it must take up a position of loneliness. "We have turned every one to his own way" is a confession importing that each man had sinned against light peculiar to himself, or sinned with an aggravation which he at least could not perceive in his fellow. It is very *unreserved.* There is not a single syllable by way of excuse; there is not a word to detract from the force of the confession. It is moreover singularly *thoughtful*, for thoughtless persons do not use a metaphor so appropriate as the text: "All we like sheep have gone astray"—like a creature cared for, but not capable of grateful attachment to the hand that cares for it; like a creature wise enough

to find the gap in the hedge by which to escape, but so silly as to have no propensity or desire to return to the place from which it had perversely wandered; like sheep habitually, constantly, wilfully, foolishly, without power to return, we have gone astray. I wish that all our confessions of sin showed a like thoughtfulness, for to use words of general confession without our soul entering into them may be but a "repentance that needeth to be repented of," an insult and mockery to high Heaven vented in that very place where there ought to have been the greatest possible tenderness and holy fear.

I. Let us consider the text by way of exposition.

1. It may be well to give the marginal translation of the text, "Jehovah hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all." The first thought that demands notice is *the meeting of sin.* Sin I may compare to the rays of some evil sun. Sin was scattered throughout this world as abundantly as light, and Christ is made to suffer the full effect of the baleful rays which stream from the sun of sin. God as it were holds up a burning glass, and concentrates all the scattered rays in a focus upon Christ. That seems to be the thought of the text, "The Lord hath focused upon Him the iniquity of us all." That which was scattered abroad everywhere is here brought into terrible concentration; upon the devoted head of our blessed Lord all the sin of His people was made to meet. (α)

2. *Sin was made to meet upon the suffering person of the innocent substitute.* I have said "the suffering person," because the connection of the text requires it (ver. 5). The Lord Jesus would have been incapable of receiving the sin of all His people as their substitute, had He been Himself a sinner; but He was the spotless Lamb of God, and therefore He was on all accounts capable of standing in the room, place, and stead of sinful men. The doctrine of the text is, that Christ did stand in such a position as to take upon Himself the iniquity of all His people, remaining still Himself innocent; having no personal sin, being incapable of any, but yet taking the sin of others upon Himself. Not only was Christ treated as if He had been guilty, but the very sin itself was, I know not how, laid upon His head (2 Cor. v. 21). Is it not written, "He shall bear," not merely the punishment of their sin, nor the imputation of their sin, but "He shall bear their iniquities"? Our sin is laid on Jesus in even a deeper and truer sense than is expressed by the term "imputation."

3. It has been asked, *Was it just that sin should thus be laid upon Christ?* Our reply is fourfold. We believe it was rightly so, (1.) Because *it was the act of Him who must do right,* for "the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (2.) *Christ voluntarily took this sin upon Himself* (John x. 18; H. E. I. 913). (3.) *There was a relationship between our Lord and His people,* which is too often forgotten, but which rendered it natural that He should bear the sin of His people. Why does the text speak of our sinning like sheep? I think it is because it would call to our recollection that *Christ is our Shepherd.* It is not that Christ took upon Himself the sins of strangers. Remember that there always was a union of a most mysterious and intimate kind between those who sinned and the Christ who suffered. The Lord Jesus stood in the relationship of a married husband unto His Church, and it was not, therefore, a strange thing that He should bear her burdens. (4.) *This plan of salvation is precisely similar to the method of our ruin.* How did we fall? Not by any one of us actually ruining himself. Our own sin is the ground of ultimate punishment, but the ground of our original fall lay in another. If we grant the fall,—and we must grant the fact, however we may dislike the principle,—we cannot think it unjust that God should give us a plan of salvation based upon the same principle of federal headship.

4. *Sin lying upon Christ brought upon Him all the consequences connected with it.* (β) God cannot look where there

is sin with any pleasure, and though, as far as Jesus is personally concerned, He is the Father's beloved Son in whom He is well pleased, it was not possible that He should enjoy the light of His Father's presence while He was made sin for us; consequently He went through a horror of great darkness, the root and source of which was the withdrawing of the conscious enjoyment of His Father's presence. More than that, not only was light withdrawn, but positive sorrow was inflicted. God must punish sin (γ), and though the sin was not Christ's by His actually doing it, yet it was laid upon Him, and therefore He was made a curse for us.

What were the pangs which Christ endured? I cannot tell you. You have read the story of His crucifixion. That is only the shell, but the inward kernel who shall describe? His griefs are worthy to be described according to the Greek Liturgy as "unknown sufferings." The height and depth, the length and breadth of what Jesus Christ endured nor heart can guess, nor tongue can tell, nor can imagination frame; God only knows the griefs to which the Son of God was put when the Lord made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all (H. E. I. 915). To crown all there came death itself. Death is the punishment for sin, and whatever it may mean, whatever over and beyond natural death was intended in the sentence, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die," Christ felt. Death went through and through Him, until "He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." "He became obedient to death, even to the death of the cross."

II. Now consecrate a few moments to hallowed contemplation. Think, 1. *Of the astounding mass of sin that must have been laid on Christ* (John i. 29; 1 John ii. 2). All the sins against light and knowledge, sins against law and gospel, week-day sins, Sabbath sins, hand sins, lip sins, heart sins, sins against the Father, sins against the Son, sins against the Holy Ghost, sins of all shapes, all laid upon Him!

2. *The amazing love of Jesus, which brought Him to do all this* (Rom. v. 6–8. H. E. I. 920, 946–949).

3. *The matchless security which this plan of salvation offers.* I do not see in what point that man is vulnerable who can feel and know that Christ has borne his sin. I look at the attributes of God, and though to me, as a sinner, they all seem bristling as with sharp points, thrusting themselves upon me; yet when I know that Jesus died for me, and did literally take my sin, what fear I the attributes of God? (H. E. I. 2286). There is justice, sharp and bright, like a lance; but justice is my friend. If God be just, He cannot punish me for sin for which Jesus has offered satisfaction. As long as there is justice in the heart of Deity, it cannot be that a soul justly claiming Christ as his substitute can himself be punished. As for mercy, love, truth, honour, everything matchless, Godlike, and divine about Deity, I say of all these, "You are my friends; you are all guarantees that since Jesus died for me I cannot die." How grandly does the apostle put it! (Rom. viii. 33, 34).

4. *What, then, are the claims of Jesus Christ upon you and upon me?* Did our blessed Lord take your sin, my brethren, and suffer all its terrific consequences for you, so that you are delivered? By His blood and wounds, by His death, and by the love that made Him die, I conjure you treat Him as He should be treated! You will tell me that you have obeyed His precepts. I am glad to hear it. But if you can say this, I am not content; it does not seem to me that with such a leader as Christ mere obedience should be all. Napoleon singularly enough had power to get the hearts of men twisted and twined about him; when he was in his wars there were many of his captains and even of his private soldiers who not only marched with the quick obedience of a soldier wherever they were bidden, but who felt an enthusiasm for him. Have you never heard of him who threw himself in the way of the shot to receive it in his bosom to save the Emperor? No

obedience, no law could have required that of him, but enthusiastic love moved him to it; and it is such enthusiasm that my Master deserves in the very highest degree from us.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 694.

(α) Before a great storm when the sky is growing black and the wind is beginning to howl, you have seen the clouds hurrying from almost every point of the compass as though the great day of battle were come, and all the dread artillery of God were hurrying to the field. In the centre of the whirlwind and the storm, when the lightnings threaten to set all heaven on a blaze, and the black clouds fold on fold labour to conceal the light of day, you have a very graphic metaphor of the meeting of all sin upon the person of Christ; the sin of the ages past and the sin of the ages to come, the sins of those of the elect who were in heathendom, and of those who were in Jewry; the sin of the young and of the old, sin original and sin actual, all made to meet, all the black clouds concentrated and brought together into one great tempest, that it might rush in one tremendous tornado upon the person of the great Redeemer and substitute. As when a thousand streamlets dash down the mountain side in the day of rain, and all meet in one deep swollen lake; that lake the Saviour's heart, those gushing torrents, the sins of us all who are here described as making a full confession of our sins. Or, to take a metaphor not from nature but from commerce, suppose the debts of a great number of persons to be all gathered up, the scattered bonds and bills that are to be honoured or dishonoured on such and such a day, and all these laid upon one person who undertakes the responsibility of meeting every one of them without a single assistant; such was the condition of the Saviour; the Lord made to meet on Him the debts of all His people, so that He became responsible for all the obligations of every one of those whom His Father had given Him, whatsoever their debts might be. Or if these metaphors do not suffice to set forth the meaning, take the text in our own version, "The Lord *hath laid on Him* the iniquity of us all;" put upon Him, as a burden is laid upon a man's back, all the burdens of all His people; put upon His head, as the high priest of old laid upon the scape-goat, all the sin of the beloved ones that He might bear them in His own person. The two translations are perfectly consistent; all sins are made to meet, and then having met together and been tied up in one crushing load the whole burden is laid upon Him.—*Spurgeon.*

The expression "laid on Him" is rendered in the margin "hath made to meet on Him," and allusion is supposed to be made to the scape-goat (Lev. xvi. 8–14). This ceremony was typical of the Great Sinbearer; but it is only a part of Christ's atoning work, the other part being represented by the other goat which was slain in sacrifice. The scape-goat alone is not an adequate representation. Besides, the verb has a stronger meaning than the laying of hands on the head. It conveys the idea of violent collision—to strike, push, urge. "Jehovah hath made to strike or rush upon Him the iniquity of us all." Our sin was the procuring cause of Christ's death, and actually brought it about. He was appointed to occupy the place of sinners, and to bear the punishment which they had incurred, and which, but for His enduring it, they must have suffered in their own persons.

Other interpreters see a different figure in this clause. The verse, they think, would be disjointed and broken, unless the image introduced at the beginning be regarded as underlying the whole. As man's transgression is exhibited as a strayed flock, the atonement made for them would naturally be represented as the means employed to bring them back to the fold, or to avert the evils to which they are exposed. Our iniquity is like a band of ravening wolves, but Jehovah appoints His Son to come in between us and our destroyers. This is the very picture which Jesus Himself draws (John x. 11). But we cannot understand the passage in this light, without doing violence to the language of the prophet. Were the figure carried out in the last clause, we should have some such statement as that of Peter (1 Pet. ii. 25). We, therefore, take the words in their literal sense. The statement, no doubt, is obscure, and could not be fully comprehended until its fulfilment; but, viewed in the light of Gethsemane and Calvary, it has a fulness of meaning and a completeness of realisation. We must remember that the prophet views the death of Christ as just over; all His agonies are vividly before him, and he says, "The Lord hath caused the iniquity of us all to strike upon Him." The standpoint of the prophet, from which he surveys his subject, is placed between the humiliation and the exaltation of our Lord, when He lay in Joseph's tomb. From that point he looks back on the sufferings, and forward to the triumphs and glories of the Redeemer.—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

(β) For a more careful and discriminating statement of this point, see the outline by Dr. Alexander, p. 506.

(γ) 1. His attribute of justice, which is as undoubtedly a part of His glory as His attribute of love, required that sin should be punished. 2. As God had been pleased to make a moral universe to be governed by laws, there would be an end of all government if the breaking of law involved no penalty whatever. 3. Inasmuch as there is sin in the world, it is the highest benevolence to do all that can be done to restrain the horrible pest. It would be far from benevolent for our government to throw wide the doors of all the jails, to abolish the office of the judge, to

suffer every thief and every offender of every kind to go unpunished; instead of mercy it would be cruelty; it might be mercy to the offending, but it would be intolerable injustice towards the upright and inoffensive. God's very benevolence demands that the detestable rebellion of sin against His supreme authority should be put down with a firm hand, that men may not flatter themselves that they can do evil and yet go unpunished. The necessities of moral government require that sin must be punished.—*Spurgeon.*

Our faith is retrospective as Isaiah's was anticipatory; faith annihilates the past, and the believer stands in the presence of an actual cross. A stupendous fact is that to which our faith turns. Satan tried to lay iniquity on Christ, and failed. Having met Satan and the powers of evil in struggle after struggle, He yet challenged blame with absolute assurance (John viii. 46). Wicked men strove to lay iniquity on Christ. Judas (Matt. xxvi. 4), Pilate (Matt. xxii. 21). The Church of Jerusalem sought to lay iniquity on Him as guilty of impiety. But he was most devout. He received the sign of the covenant in circumcision, and feast days, &c., were observed by Him with conscientious devotion and carefulness. All these many powers were foiled in attaching sin to the person or character of Jesus Christ. What, then, means the darkness that gathers around the cross? "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." That which sinners failed to do, God in sovereignty that day accomplished, and this sinless Man has become the substitute for the race (2 Cor. v. 21).

I. THE MEETING-PLACE OF ALL SIN IS THE CROSS OF CHRIST. In the margin, our text is rendered, "Hath made the iniquity of us all to *meet* on Him."

II. THE MEETING-PLACE OF SIN IS THE MERCY-SEAT FOR ALL SINNERS. 1. How gracious is the assurance! 2. To rest in this assurance is to make sure of our salvation. 3. This should render our worship grateful.

CONCLUSION.—The imperative claim Christ has upon the soul. If you will not consent that your iniquites shall meet on Christ, bear them you must yourself.—*Stephen H. Tyng, jr., D.D.* · *Study and Homilitic Monthly*, new series, vol. iv. pp. 328, 329.

CHRIST BEARING OUR SINS.

liii. 6. *The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

1. Peter ii. 24. *Who His own self bear our sins in His own body on the tree.*

These texts are not unusual declarations of Scripture, but are of a very numerous class. The doctrine which they set before us is woven into the very texture of Christianity, and furnishes the great resting-place of faith. And, what is especially proper to be observed this day, it is the truth of all others which we are coming to celebrate at the holy table. Yet it has been so altered, and diminished, and shorn of its genuine dignity and proportions, that we often need to re-examine its meaning, and reassert the foundations of our faith. In our own day there is a manifest tendency to explain away its import, and to concede undue force to the objections of opponents. These objections have in many instances been aimed at opinions charged upon us, which we do not hold; at exaggerations, perversions, and even caricatures of the truth: and all the changes have been rung on the terms imputation, satisfaction, and substitution, as if these had been found chargeable with inherent injustice or absurdity. The very first thing, therefore, which we should attempt, is to clear away certain mists which have been conjured up around the Scriptural statement.

I. WHAT WE DO NOT MEAN BY CHRIST BEARING OUR SINS.

1. When we assert that Christ bore our sins, *we do not mean that He was a sinner.* He is, by way of eminence, "*Jesus Christ the righteous.*" Only an

such could He ever have cleared away our guilt. He bore our sins, without bearing their power or their pollution. Of their vileness and lawlessness His soul had no experience.

2. *We do not mean that He suffered pain of conscience.* Remorse is the necessary consequence of sin, and part of its punishment. But He who knew no sin, could know no repentance, no contrition, no personal regrets, no anguish of guilty self-accusation. Even in Gethsemane, when His soul was exceeding sorrowful, and on the cross, when He pierced heaven with His imploring cry, He could no more suffer compunction of conscience, than He could speak falsehood, or blaspheme.

3. *We do not mean that Christ was at any time personally displeasing to God.* He bore the wrath of God, but He bore it representatively. He never was more pleasing to God, He never was more righteous, He never was more acceptable and lovely, He never was more intensely and immeasurably fulfilling the will of God, than when He cried, *Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani!* If this exclamation has a difficulty, it is a difficulty for the adversaries of substitution: let them explain it. For our part, we hold it to be an awfully mysterious expression of the truth, that at that moment of darkness and earthquake, Jesus Christ was so involved in the consequences of our sin, as to sink under the sense of agony, and to feel the absence of all consoling divine influence. But while angels stooped to look into these things, they might have heard from the invisible throne the words of infinite complacency: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" The all-holy Jehovah cannot hate holiness, and could not hate His only-begotten Son, in the exercise of the sublimest holiness which the universe has known.

4. *We do not mean that there was any transfer of personal character.* The chief strength of our opposers lies in this fallacy. They charge us with maintaining a transfer of personal attributes, and moral qualities, and easily triumph over the phantom which they have raised. We, as well they, hold such a transfer to be impossible and absurd: and (be it declared for the thousandth time) it is no such thing which we mean by the imputation of sins to Christ. Our sins must ever remain *our sins*, and the sins of no one else, as a matter of fact, as a historical verity, as a personal transaction. As deeds, and as connected with sinful motives and desires, they attach to our own persons, and are to be repented of, and eternally remembered by us as our own. And, on the other hand, Christ's acts and sufferings, as matter of fact and history, are and cannot but for ever be, His own acts and sufferings, and those of no other being in the universe. There is no confounding of personality, nor has such a thing ever been maintained by our theologians, though assiduously and pertinaciously charged, during at least two centuries. We hold indeed an intimate and blessed union between the head and the members; we hold that our sins were visited on Him, and that His righteousness enures to our benefit, but we repudiate all such commingling of personality as this imagined tenet would convey.

II. WHAT WE DO MEAN WHEN WE ASSERT THAT CHRIST BORE OUR SINS.

1. *The Lord Jesus Christ bore our nature.* It was the all-essential preliminary to His whole work. To be our Head, "the Word was made flesh."

2. *Christ actually endured pain.* It was in this way only that He could bear our sins.

3. *The Lord Jesus Christ suffered for our sins.* It is one of those truths which lie on the very surface of the Scripture, and which must be twisted into violent metaphor, before it can be robbed of its meaning. To give but a few instances—Isa. liii. 4, 5; Rom. v. 6, 8; 1 Cor. xv. 3; 1 Thess. v. 10; 1 Pet. ii. 21, iii. 18, iv. 1.

They declare, first, that Christ's sufferings were for us, and secondly, that they were for our sins. A friend, a father, a husband, a sister, may suffer, and yet not for us; or these beloved ones may suffer for us, and yet not for our sins. But the suffer-

ing of Jesus stands out with this striking peculiarity, that it is always represented as being, not only for our sakes, but for our sins.

4. *Christ bore our sins, in this sense, that He bore the penalty of our sins.* This is the primary, obvious, and necessary meaning of the words. "Christ died *for* us," that is, died in our stead.

But here the adversary rejoins, that penalty must always attach to the person; that he who has sinned must be punished; and that the suffering of the innocent cannot benefit the guilty. If this were true, it would at once cut off all our hopes, and put an end to all proper atonement. But it is not true. The Church in all ages has held first, that sin for its own sake deserves the wrath and curse of God; and secondly, that to redeem us from the law, God sent His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, who in His own person fulfilled those demands, and endured that curse in our stead. And this is so far from violating any of our natural principles of justice, that it is of all things most suited to relieve and pacify the afflicted conscience.

The Scriptures represent the penalty as a debt, which our Surety pays for us (H. E. I. 383). We are familiar with substitution of this kind in civil cases, which would not be true, if such commutation were in itself repugnant to the common sense of justice among mankind. Ancient history has striking instances of similar substitution in criminal and capital cases. And the reason why this is not admitted in such cases, under modern jurisdiction, is not any injustice in the principle. The case, we admit, must be a peculiar one in which such a substitution can take place; and if ever there was a case thus peculiar, in which the innocent might suffer for the guilty, it is surely this. To make such suffering allowable, the innocent person must be one who has lordship and dominion over his own life; which men in common life have not; but which the Son of God had: "*I lay it down of Myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*" Again, the innocent surety must assume the place and penalty of his own free will: which was eminently and gloriously true of the Lord Jesus. Again, he must be able to answer all the demands of the law, for those whom he represented. Again, he must be able to restore himself from death: no mere man could do this, and therefore if such a substitution were to take place in a capital instance, the state would lose a good citizen. In the substitution, then, of this willing, glorious, triumphant Surety, there is no injustice, but infinite grace.

They object to us that it is incredible that the holy and just God should charge upon Christ the sins of others, and thus make the innocent suffer in the place of the guilty. But let them answer, Is it more credible, or more equitable, that the holy and just God should subject the innocent Redeemer to such sufferings, without any such imputation? Christ suffered and died. This is the admitted fact. Now, did He suffer as a surety for the sinner, taking his place? or did He suffer, without being a surety, as an innocent being, by a mere arbitrary infliction? The difficulty appears to be altogether with the objectors to atonement. (α)

5. *Christ so bore our sins, as to remove from us all their penal consequences, and secure our salvation.* By that suffering He exhausted the penalty and discharged the debt. He who believes, in the very moment of believing, becomes one with Christ, and graciously entitled to all that Christ has purchased for His people. The death of Christ is not merely a transaction which makes our pardon possible, contingent, or even probable: it secures it. It breaks all the penal force of the law. Whatever chastisements, even death itself, may henceforth befall the believer, none of them can befall him in the character of punishment. The law is as fully and eternally at peace with a justfied sinner, as though he had never sinned. And this is the glad news which first of all brings peace to the soul of a convinced penitent. He beholds the Cross, and sees how God

can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly that believeth in Jesus.

CONCLUSION.—1. *When we behold Christ bearing our sins, we should learn to look on sin with shame and horror.* How intense must that evil be which demands such a sacrifice!

2. *When we behold Christ bearing our sins, we should see in Him the object of saving faith.* In all the universe of nature and grace—this is the point for the eye of a convinced sinner.

3. *When we behold Christ bearing our sins, we have before us the greatest of all motives to personal holiness.* When temptation comes in a like tide, cast your eyes to the Cross (H. E. I. 4589, 4590).—*J. W. Alexander, D.D.: The Preacher's Monthly*, vol. iii. pp. 222–226.

(a) All the ancient sacrifices wrote in letters of blood the word *Substitution*. For what, after all, is the idea of sacrifice but the innocent dying for the guilty? It was an emblem which the feeblest mind might comprehend. There, on the altar, is a spotless lamb—the emblem of innocence. Here am I, a polluted sinner. I lay my right hand on the unblemished victim, and straightway it becomes in type a sinner. I should have died—but now the victim dies: it dies for me—it dies in my place. It was thus the way was prepared for the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. It is not here and there, but everywhere, that the Bible thus represents the method of our salvation (Isa. liii. 5, 6, 10–12; Gal. iii. 13; 2 Cor. v. 21). This doctrine is taught in expressions which cannot be mistaken by an unbiassed mind. And we never find unsophisticated persons troubled with those difficulties which have made this doctrine a stumbling-block to Jews and philosophers. There is something intelligible and lovely in Christ's coming into our place and dying for us. Especially when a soul is overwhelmed with a sense of sin and dread of eternal wrath, the truth is the only thing which can give life. —*Alexander.*

DIVINE LOVE IN CHRIST'S PASSION.

liii. 6. *The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

"I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil," said the Lord to His people. And if we could know the thoughts He thinks towards us, we should hardly tell how to admire sufficiently His love for us, or to humble ourselves enough for our baseness towards Him.

The love which God hath for us is manifested in our creation, and in His continual care over us ever since we were born. But in a measure far beyond that in all other instances of His love, it is displayed in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. But, unhappily, after all that is said of the redeeming love of God, with all the proofs of it in the wonderful things done for our salvation, many have little notion of the Divine kindness exercised in this great and glorious work. Were it better understood, more hearts would be melted into sorrowful contrition for sin, and thence brought to faith and holiness, and so prepared for the kingdom of God.

Let us consider, then, how awful is the accumulated weight of sin laid upon Jesus—"the iniquities of us all," of the entire human race! (1 John ii. 2). Oh, how can we calculate the weight of this burden? how can we number and measure the sins of the whole world? how can we estimate the punishment due to them which our Saviour endured in our stead? The sins that began with the sins of Eve and Adam, and have been increasing in all times and climes ever since, how appalling their number! When we call to mind that *one* sin was sufficient, in the judgment of the righteous God, to condemn men to sorrow and death, we wonder not that the contemplation of the burden that awaited our Saviour in atoning for "the iniquities of us all" laid Him prostrate in Gethsemane, caused Him to sweat "as it were great drops of blood," and to pray that if it were possible that "cup" might pass from Him. No man with his present confined faculties can form an adequate notion of the weight of affliction which Christ endured, when He stood in the place of a world of sinners. All we can say is, that it was something which

was equivalent, in the scales of Divine justice, to the eternal punishment due to the sins of all mankind (1 Pet. ii. 24; Rom. iii. 26). After all the notions I can form of the sufferings of Jesus, all that I can do as a thinker is to stand with awful astonishment contemplating the cross, overwhelmed with thoughts of the unseen and unknown sufferings of my Redeemer.

I. Now, our apprehension of *the love of Jesus* must run parallel with our apprehension of His sufferings. The more He had to endure, the greater effort of love must have been required to urge Him to undergo it. If a man, seeing another whom he loved condemned to a cruel death, were to go and suffer in his place, we should stand amazed at such a man, and say that he was possessed of an extraordinary measure of charity. How much more, if he were to endure for him the everlasting sufferings of hell! But, how incomprehensibly great would his charity appear, if he could call down upon himself sufferings equivalent to the eternal sufferings of the whole race of mankind! Yet when we contemplate Jesus on the cross, we see one having thus acted. How infinitely great, how stupendous, this makes the love of Christ appear!

The *manner* in which He suffered also manifests His love for us. With all the mighty love with which He was urged through His sufferings, with all the strength of firmness and resolution with which He endured to the end, with all the immeasurable greatness of His passion, and the vast amount of good He was accomplishing, still there was no vain display of His love or of His endurance, no boast of the great things He was effecting. Not a word did He utter of what He was enduring, or what He was purchasing for us. Humble and quiet lowliness and gentle meekness were the dispositions manifested in Him, through all that He did and suffered for us (ver. 7). Now, it is always true love that is the secret of lowly suffering for others. Who can see lowly sorrow, and humble patience and resignation in bitter affliction, *especially when it is endured for the benefit of others*, without a feeling of love towards the charitable sufferer? Must not that which we see manifested in Jesus attract us to Him, and excite in our hearts admiring love? (P. D. 2340, 2341).

II. In proportion to the sorrow and pain which were laid upon the Son of God, is *the measure of the Father's love* in giving Him up to such suffering abasement for us. Here also we see that the Divine love is beyond all bound or measure of ours. If the sufferings and abasements of the Son were infinitely, immeasurably great, the love of the Father, who gave Him up to the pain and humiliation of the cross, must be incomprehensible also. Oh, where is our heart, that we are so little affected with God's redeeming love; that our return for it is ingratitude and sin? But our very worthlessness magnifies the Divine love. Had it been for unhappy creatures in misery, but not in fault, that God gave His beloved Son, had it been even for those who would one and all prize, highly value, and abound in love for what was done for them, still the love of God in this unspeakable gift would have been immeasurably great; but how incomprehensibly vast does it appear, when we consider how offensive in God's sight sin has made mankind, how great a portion of mankind never take any notice at all of the Divine love in the great redemption, and how slow the best of us are to see and be grateful for "the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness to us through Christ Jesus!" We feel that it rises above all speech or thought of ours (Rom. v. 7, 8. H. E. I. 2318–2337. P. D. 1468, 2345).—*R. L Cotton, M.A.: The Way of Salvation*, pp. 78–91.

Our Saviour's Sufferings and Submission.

liii. 7. *He was oppressed, &c.*

The whole field of Scripture is of infinite value, yet the Christian peculiarly prizes those parts of it wherein Christ, the hidden treasure, the one pearl of great price, is most fully exhibited to the view. This chapter holds a first rank in His esteem, because here, long before our Redeemer's incarnation, He was evidently set forth crucified. Isaiah here discourses of Him with a pathetic tenderness and minuteness of detail, as if he had been an eyewitness of His sufferings. Had he stood with John at the cross, or watched with Mary at the sepulchre, he could scarcely have presented a more vivid and touching picture of the sufferings of Christ and the glory by which they were followed. The purport of the chapter is, that the Messiah would devote Himself as a voluntary sacrifice, a real and effectual expiation, suffering the heaviest woes and all the bitterness of death, in concurrence with the gracious intention of Jehovah, and for the salvation of rebellious men.

I. The overwhelming nature of the Redeemer's sufferings (α).

As it was no common sufferer who is here pointed out, so they were no common sufferings He endured. "He was oppressed." Who? "The brightness of the Father's glory!" We are so constituted as to be more affected by the afflictions of distinguished men than by those of the multitude; our sympathy is awakened when princes endure great reverses and hardships; when sickness clouds the royal brow, and death enters the pavilion of the mighty, whence we are ready to imagine every care is excluded. But here you have the extreme of greatness in conjunction with the extreme of suffering. "He was *oppressed!*"

The union and combination of various forms of suffering is implied: "despised," "rejected," "Man of sorrows," "acquainted with grief." Described as bearing griefs, carrying sorrows, stricken and smitten of God, afflicted, wounded, bruised, subjected to chastisement and stripes, and here "oppressed." It did not suffice that He was shorn as a sheep—stripped and deprived of His riches, ornaments, and comforts; but His life is demanded. "He is brought to the slaughter."

1. *He suffered at the hand of God.* "Smitten of God." Voluntarily standing in the sinner's place, He must endure the first penalty of sin. In nothing is the righteous displeasure of God against sin more displayed, His determination to visit us to the uttermost more exemplified, than in the sufferings of Christ. He, even He, must be smitten with the sharp sword of sin-avenging justice (Zech. xiii. 7). It would seem as though all the former executions of justice had only been inflicted as with a sword asleep, or in the scabbard, compared with what Jesus felt. Against Him it was awakened, unsheathed, and made to descend with unmitigated force and severity.

2. *He suffered at the hand of man.* It was much that He was to be "a Man of sorrows," but more that He was "despised and rejected of men." He who was ready to relieve every burden and break every yoke, was Himself afflicted by those whom He came to redeem. He who would not so much as "break a bruised reed," was oppressed through the whole course of His life. Contempt, reproach, and persecution were the requitals for His acts of mercy (Matt. xii. 22, 24, ix. 2, 3; John v. 8, 9, 16).

Let this console His suffering disciples, that they only follow the footsteps of the Prince of sufferers; they only drink of His cup. Let them examine, and they will find that the very grief that oppresses them oppressed Him. Be consoled by the consciousness of sharing His sympathy, and by

the certain prospect of sharing His triumph. The cross, the grave, the stone, the seal, the Roman guard, and the watchful Sanhedrim were in His case all in vain; and He has promised that the rebuke of His people shall be taken away.

3. *He suffered from the assaults of hell* (Luke xxii. 53). The temptation in the wilderness, the agony in the garden, and the sufferings of the cross were all connected with Satanic agency. Satan will not fail to trouble even where he despairs to conquer.

II. THE SILENT SUBMISSION WITH WHICH CHRIST ENDURED SUFFERING.

"He is brought as a lamb," &c. The lamb goes as quietly to the slaughter as to the fold. By this similitude the patience of Christ is exemplified, not that He was absolutely silent, for more than once He replied to the falsehoods and slanders of His enemies; but it refers to His patience, submission, and moral fortitude. From the beginning to the end He was in a perfect calm; as in His external behaviour, so in His internal frame and temper of soul. Not one repining thought against God, not one revengeful thought against man, ruffled His spirit.

What were the principles that supported Him? Pity for the world that knew not its Saviour; love for the Church He came to redeem; conformity of sentiment with the mind and will of His Father; devout anticipation of the happy results that should flow from His sufferings; the joy that was set before Him—the joy of saving souls.

III. THE PROPER RESULTS IN US OF OUR CONTEMPLATION OF THE SUFFERINGS AND SUBMISSION OF OUR SAVIOUR.

1. Faith in His sacrifice. 2. Imitation of His example. 3. Devout remembrance of His love. 4. Exultant anticipation of His glory.

—*Samuel Thodey.*

(a.) The suffering of Christ in Gethsemane was not bodily pain; physically he was in health and vigour, at the prime of life, and in the flower of His age. The torture of the cross was before Him, with all the preliminary accumulation of woe; but I cannot think that the mere apprehension of these will sufficiently account for what He endured. His mind had long been familiar with the death that He was to die, and He knew and had predicted His speedy resurrection to a glorious life. Now, it seems impossible that an event, however painful, which was to be immediately succeeded by "fulness of joy," could have thrown Him into such mysterious agony of mind. In after times, martyrs—men and women—had to entertain the prospect and undergo the infliction of death in forms as lingering and dreadful as His; and they anticipated and endured with cheerfulness, joy, magnanimity, rapture . . . Some other cause must certainly be found for Christ's darkness and distress of mind, *distinct from the mere apprehension of the cross.*

The seat of His suffering was the *soul.* But it is again and again affirmed that He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;" that He was "without spot"—had no speck or stain of guilt upon His conscience. *He could not therefore be oppressed by any feeling of personal demerit.* He had no frailty, no defect; He had never erred in thought, word, or deed; He had no conscious deficiencies to oppress Him, nothing to acknowledge and confess with shame, no necessity to pray for mercy, no iniquity to fill Him with terror at the thought of God: in spite of all this, however, His *soul* was "*troubled*"—was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death"—overpowered and beset with bitter anguish.

I know of no principle on which this *mental* suffering of a perfectly innocent and holy being can be rationally accounted for, except that which refers it to *the fact of His being a sacrificial and propitiatory victim.* "His soul was made an offering for sin," &c. . . . Can any account be given *on this ground* of the causes and nature of His extraordinary *mental* agony and terror?

The Scriptures, I think, seem to refer to three sources of this distress and anguish.

There was some mysterious conflict with the great adversary of God and man, from whose tyranny He came to redeem us. When discomfited in the Temptation, the Devil, it is said, "departed from Him *for a season*," and in Gethsemane he seems to have returned, for it was then, as Christ Himself expressed it, "the hour of the power of darkness." . . . The combined forces of the bottomless pit were brought against Him, and in some way, impossible to be explained, overwhelmed Him with darkness, discomposed His spirit, and alarmed His soul by infamous suggestions.

Then it is also said, that "it pleased the Father to bruise Him and to put Him to grief," that "*Jehovah* made His soul an offering for sin;" that *He* called for the sword, and awoke it against the Shepherd, and pierced and smote Him. Here was some mysterious infliction direct from the hand of God, some wonderful withdrawal of His countenance and

complacency, or at least of their sensible manifestation; fire descended from heaven to consume the sacrifice.

It is also said that our iniquities were "laid upon Him," and that, in some sense, He bore the curse and penalty of transgression. I need hardly say, that we reject the notion that He literally endured the punishment of sin; this would have been impossible, since that includes actual remorse, and Christ could never feel that He was a sinner, though He was treated *as if He were;* nor would it have consisted with the nature of the Gospel and the display of mercy, since, the penalty literally exacted, *mercy* would be impossible, and the sinner might demand his release from justice. Still there *was* suffering in the mind of Christ, flowing into it from human guilt; His pure mind had such an apprehension of sin, such a view of all its vile and malignant properties; its possible attributes and gigantic magnitude so rose and spread before Him, that He started in amazement from the dreadful object, and trembled, and was terrified exceedingly; sin was "laid upon Him," and it sank and crushed Him, and, in some sense, its poison and bitterness entered into His soul. The conclusion to which I am led, I confess, is this, that while I deem it impossible for Jesus to have endured that *literal* remorse, which is the natural and direct punishment of sin, yet I do think that His agony of mind was the *nearest* to this which it was possible for Him to experience. He was so affected by the pressure of sin on all sides, that He felt something like the terror, anguish, and agitation of a burdened conscience and a wounded spirit. His mind was in a tempest when His agony was at its height: it wrought upon His frame till His sweat was blood; the arrows of God seemed to have entered into His soul, He had all the appearance of a sinner stricken for his sins. I again repeat, that this could not *literally* be the case; I can only say that it was the *nearest* to it that Christ could feel or God inflict; and I see not that there is any more mystery in something of this nature being felt, than in the fact of a perfectly pure and spotless being suffering at all.—*T. Binney, LL.D.: Sermons, Second Series,* pp. 157-162.

A Sacramental Meditation.

Experimental piety does not exempt us from sufferings, but it teaches us how to bear them, especially when we contemplate a suffering Saviour (Heb. xii. 3). Let us take our stand once more by the cross of Christ, and we shall find our grief absorbed in the grief of Jesus, and as we look upon His sufferings, the remembrance of our own will be forgotten.

I. *Let us meditate upon the nature and extent of His sufferings.* They were anticipated, voluntary, vicarious, unparalleled.

II. *Let us muse upon the salutary lessons which Christ's sufferings teach.* 1. The immeasurableness of His love (John xv. 9). 2. The enormity of our sins. 3. The debt of gratitude we owe to Jesus. 4. The spirit we should evince in suffering.

Renew your vows of perpetual fealty, and seal them at this sacramental board.—*A. Tucker.*

Christ's Silence Under Suffering.

(Sermon before the Lord's Supper.)

liii. 7. *He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth.*

I. The fact that Christ was silent under His sufferings.

1. *He was silent before man.* He was oppressed and afflicted, mocked and reviled by wicked men, yet He did not justify Himself before man. This is true—(1.) When He was taken prisoner. (2.) In His trial before Caiaphas. (3.) In His trial before Pilate. (4.) Upon the cross.

2. *Christ was silent before God.* (1.) In the garden; how He was bruised there (Luke xxii. 44). He might have said, "This is no cup of mine; let them drink it that filled it by their sins." But no; He only cries that it may pass from Him. Prayer is the cry of one who feels no right to demand. (2.) On the cross. There God hid His face from Him. Yet, did He say it was unjust? No.

II. The reasons why Christ was silent under His sufferings.

1. *Because He knew His sufferings were all infinitely just.* He was a substitute in the room of sinners.

2. *Because He would keep His part of the covenant.* Before the world was He entered into covenant with His Father, that He would stand as a substitute for sinners; and therefore when He did come to suffer, His very righteousness sustained and restrained Him.

3. *Because of His love.* Love to perishing sinners made the Son of God enter into covenant with His Father to bear wrath in their stead. The same love made Him keep the covenant He had made. It was love that tied His tongue, &c.

4. *Because He sought His Father's glory.* It is more glorifying to God when sin is punished in His own Son than when it is punished in the poor worms that committed it.

III. The broken bread represents the silent sufferings of Christ.

I set before you the plainest and simplest picture of the silent sufferings of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. In that night in which He was betrayed He took bread. Why bread? 1. Because of its plainness and commonness. He did not take silver, or gold, or jewels, to represent His body, but plain bread, to show you that when He became a surety for sinners, He did not come in His original glory, with His Father's angels (Heb. ii. 16). 2. He chose bread to show you that He was dumb, and opened not His mouth. When I break the bread it resists not—it complains not—it yields to my hand. So it was with Christ. Some of you believe not. You do not consent to take this silent Lamb as a sin-offering for your soul. Either you do not feel your need of Him, or you have not faith to look to Him. But if you do not truly look to Him, be not so rash, so daring, so inconsistent as to take the bread and wine. You say: It was my sin that lay so heavy on His heart, &c. Come, then, to the broken bread and poured-out wine; feed on them; appropriate Christ in them; and whilst you feed on the emblems of the silent Lamb, do this in remembrance of Jesus.—*R. M. M'Cheyne.*

I. There never was such a sufferer. II. There never were such sufferings. III. There never was such conduct under suffering.—*I. E. Page.*

The Sheep Before the Shearers.

liii. 7. *As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, &c.*

I. Consider our Saviour's patience under the figure of a sheep before her shearers. Our Lord was dumb and opened not his mouth—1. *Against his adversaries.* He did not accuse one of them of cruelty or injustice. 2. *Against any one of us.* No doubt he looked across the ages; for that eye of His was not dim, even when bloodshot on the tree, and He might have looked at your indifference and mine, at our coldness of heart and unfaithfulness, and He might have left on record some such words as these: "I am suffering for those who are utterly unworthy of my regard; their love will be a very poor return for mine," &c. But there is not a hint of such a feeling, not a trace of it. 3. *Against His Father.* 4. *Against the severity of the punishment of our sins.* I see in this *complete submission; a complete absorption in His work* (α).

II. View our own case under the same metaphor. We can go, and do go, as sheep under the shearers' hands. Just as a sheep is taken by the shearer, and its wool is all cut off, so doth the Lord take His people and shear them, taking away all their earthly comforts at times, and leaving them bare as shorn sheep. I wish when it came to our turn to undergo this shearing operation it could be said of us as of our Lord. I fear that we open our mouths a great deal, and make no end of complaint.

1. *A sheep rewards its owner for all his care and trouble by being shorn.* There is nothing else that I know of

that a sheep can do. Some of God's people can give to Christ a tribute of gratitude by active service, and they should do so gladly every day of their lives; but many others cannot do much in active service, and about the only reward they can give to their Lord is to give up their fleece by suffering when He calls upon them to suffer; submissively yielding to be shorn of their personal comfort when the time comes for patient endurance (H. E. I. 157, 158).

2. *The sheep is itself benefited by the operation of shearing.* So when the Lord shears us, we do not like the operation any more than the sheep do; but it is for *His glory*, and for *our benefit*, and therefore we are bound most willingly to submit (H. E. I. 204–212).

3. *Before sheep are shorn they are always washed.* Whenever a trial threatens to overtake you, before it actually arrives you should ask the Lord to sanctify you. If He is going to clip the wool, ask Him to wash it before He takes it off; ask to be cleansed in spirit, soul, and body.

4. *After the washing, and the sheep has dried, it actually loses what was its comfort.* It is thrown down, and you see the shearers; you wonder at them, and pity the poor sheep. It will happen to you that you shall lose what is your comfort. Will you recollect this? Because the next time you receive a fresh comfort you must say, this is a loan.

5. *The shearers, when they are taking the wool off the sheep, take care not to hurt the sheep.* They clip as close as they can, but they do not cut the skin. Be ye sure that when the Lord is clipping and shearing us He will not hurt us; He will take our comforts away, but He will not really injure us, or cause a wound to our spirits. If ever the shears do make us bleed, it is because we kick, because we struggle.

6. *The shearers always shear at a suitable time.* It would be a very wicked, cruel, and unwise thing to begin sheep-shearing in winter time. Whenever the Lord afflicts us He selects the best possible time.

7. *When God takes away our mercies He is ready to supply us with more.* It is with us as with the sheep, *there is new wool coming.* Whenever the Lord takes away our earthly comforts with one hand, one, two, three, He restores with the other hand six, twelve, scores, a hundred; He takes away by spoonfuls, and He gives by cartloads; we are crying and whining about the little loss, and yet it is necessary in order that we may be able to receive the great mercy.

III. **Imitate the example of our blessed Lord when our turn comes to be shorn.** Let us be dumb before the shearers—submissive, quiescent, even as He was.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1543.

(a.) He had never been slow of speech when He could bless the sons of men, but He would not say a single word for Himself. "Never man spake like this Man," and never man was silent like Him. Was this singular silence the index of His perfect self-sacrifice? Did it show that He would not utter a word to stay the slaughter of His sacred person, which he had dedicated as an offering for us? Had He so entirely surrendered Himself that He would not interfere in His own behalf, even in the minutest degree, but be bound and slain an unstruggling, uncomplaining victim. Was this silence a type of the defencelessness of sin? Nothing can be said in palliation or excuse of human guilt; and, therefore, He who bore its whole weight stood speechless before His judge. Is not patient silence the best reply to a gainsaying world? Calm endurance answers some questions infinitely more conclusively than the loftiest eloquence. The best apologists for Christianity in the early days were martyrs. The anvil breaks a host of hammers by quietly bearing their blows. Did not the silent Lamb of God furnish us with a grand example of wisdom? Where every word was occasion for new blasphemy, it was the line of duty to afford no fuel for the flame of sin. The ambiguous and the false, the unworthy and the mean, will ere long overthrow and confute themselves, and therefore the true can afford to be quiet, and finds silence to be its wisdom. Evidently our Lord, by His silence, furnished a remarkable fulfilment of prophecy. A long defence of Himself would have been contrary to Isaiah's prediction. By His quiet He conclusively proved Himself to be the true Lamb of God.—*Spurgeon.*

CHRIST STRICKEN.

(Sacramental Service.)

liii. 8. *For the transgression of my people was He stricken.*

The general doctrine of the text is that of an expiation for sinners, made by an innocent victim substituted in their place. In the substitution of an innocent being to suffer in the room of the guilty (and especially such a being as Jesus Christ), and in pardoning and accepting the guilty into favour on that account, there appears a departure from all our common ideas of justice and propriety, &c. We have no disposition to diminish this singularity. It stands alone. But we certainly shall fail of the just and real essence of the Christian religion in our hearts, if we do not have faith in this expiation; and if our minds cannot compass the whole amazing matter, we may hope at least to have some gleams of illumination, like the lightning's flash on the dark bosom of the storm. Let us see:

I. *The wonder of this punishment for sin laid upon an innocent and Divine Being accords with our best conceptions of God.* The most just conception of God that we have ever had is that of an incomprehensible Being. The high wonder of this expiation agrees with the infinitude of God. A suffering Christ is an infinite wonder; and, therefore, the wonder of the doctrine of an expiation for sinners by the sufferings of the innocent, instead of being a reason for our incredulity, is really a reason for our faith. The innocence, the person, and the expiation of the Victim, all accord with the incomprehensible God, &c. Beyond us, and peculiar in everything else, He is beyond us and peculiar in the great atonement.

II. *Our God has different modes of giving intimations of Himself.* We cannot learn all that we are able to know of Him in any one spot, or by any one transaction. To lead us on He has employed grades, and built one scaffolding above another. There is matter which came from nothing at His bidding; and in this world we may learn something of His control over matter. We may lift our eyes beyond this world, and as we look out upon the stars, we may add to our knowledge of God's government over material things. Beyond matter is mind. Beyond mere intelligence there is a kingdom of sensibilities. Still beyond there is a moral kingdom. The world of grace is still higher. Redemption—the salvation of sinners—is not a matter of mere creation, or mere government or recovery from ruin merely; it is a matter of mercy to the sinning and the punishment of sin. This matter evidently lies beyond all others. *"Stricken for my people"* is just the amazing thing which the rising gradations of the revelations of God demand.

III. *The mystery, the wonder of this redemption of sinners, by "stripes" laid on Christ, accords with us, as well as it accords with God.* We are sinners. See what sin hath done. Some symbols of its mischief are visible. It blasted paradise, &c.! Sin has broken up our relations with God. Our Creator, our final Judge, is against us! The law which sin has broken is God's law—the law for the immortal spirit—the law for eternity to come! Eternity! The mind staggers under the weight of that idea. To last on *for ever*, a sinner cut off from God, and no more at peace with myself than with Him; to feel eternally the gnawings of "the worm that dieth not" and the wrath of God! Sooner come annihilation! Now, in the presence of these wants, this sin which has no analogy, which has broken up our peace relations with God, this conscience, these agonies of a fearing spirit, and this dreadful eternity—what shall God do for us? What we want Him to do? Just what

has done. We want Him to meet our infinite fears with His infinite offers, our worst foes with His ineffable grace; to show us while we stand trembling before His justice, that something has been done which that justice cannot find fault with—something which shall wave the peace-branch over the door into eternity! He has done it. It is His own work, on His own authority, like Him, and just because it has such wonders about it as the innocence and mysterious person of a suffering Christ, our faith can trust it. Where we most fear, God is most wonderful. The excellence and the innocence of the sacrifice as the ground of our peace, shows us that the august redemption perfectly assorts with the ineffable woes and wants of our sinful condition.

4. *The uses we ought to make of this subject are not trivial.* There are those who have no living faith in this atonement, and who will not come to the memorial of it. Why? Simply because of two things. (1.) They have low and grovelling ideas of God—ideas very much confined to His earthly things and His natural attributes. (2.) They do not justly realise their condition and necessities as sinners. If men have inadequate notions of God, they will have inadequate notions of sin. If they have inadequate notions of sin, they will have inadequate notions of Christ; and then there will be nothing seen in their condition to drive them, and nothing in His character to draw them, to His infinite sacrifice. If they had anything like a just idea of what it is to be a sinner, they would look to the sacrifice of Christ with amazing gladness and gratitude.—*Ichabod S. Spencer, D.D.: Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 412–431.

The Burial of Jesus.

liii. 9. *And He made His grave with the wicked, &c.*

The death and resurrection of Christ are frequently dwelt upon by preachers and writers; but His burial is seldom distinctly alluded to. Yet it is spoken of in Scripture as a most important fact (Acts xiii. 29; 1 Cor. xv. 4; Eph. iv. 9, 10).

I. The honourable burial granted to Jesus who had been so ignominiously put to death.

1. *He was to have been buried with criminals.* "They appointed Him His grave with criminals" (Dr. Calkins). Not satisfied with His sufferings and death, they sought to insult Him even in death by wishing to bury His corpse with criminals (Matt. xxvii. 38; John xix. 31). They intended to heap the highest possible indignity upon Him, denying him the privilege of an honourable burial (1 Kings xxi. 19; Isa. xiv. 19; Jer. xxvi. 23). As a matter of course, since He was put to death with wicked men, He would naturally have been buried with them, unless there had been some special interposition in His case. He was given up to be treated as a criminal; He was made to take the place of a murderer, Barabbas, on the cross; He was subjected to the same indignity and cruelty to which the two malefactors were, and it was evidently designed also that He should be buried in the same manner, and probably in the same grave (John xix. 31). Who can but wonder at the striking accuracy of the prediction?

2. *He was really buried in a grave that was intended for the corpse of a rich man.* "With a rich man after His death." The purpose which had been cherished in regard to His burial was not accomplished. He was buried by persons of distinction: Joseph and Nicodemus—men of rank—secret disciples now emboldened. How different this from the interment of malefactors! How striking and accurate the fulfilment of prophecy! (Matt. xxvii. 57–60; John xix. 39, 40). "He who died as a malefactor was buried as a king." All the more remarkable because during His life He was associated with the poor,

and was Himself poor. The humiliation was over, and the exaltation was begun!

II. THE REASON WHY JESUS RECEIVED SUCH HONOURABLE TREATMENT. It was found in the fact—

1. *That He had done no wrong.* "Because," rather, although "He had done no violence"—had not by harsh and injurious conduct provoked such treatment, or in any way deserved it at their hands. He was perfectly innocent—suffered without having committed any crime. To none did He do wrong. He was charged with perverting the nation and sowing sedition, but the charge was utterly false. He had done no violence, but "went about doing good." His actions were always prompted by purest benevolence. Evidently with this passage in view, the Apostle Peter says of the Lord Jesus: "Who did no sin," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 20). Those who knew Him best spake thus. Well did Peter remember the unsullied purity, the loving gentleness, the high principles of our Lord. As he looked back on that life, it must have seemed like a pure pellucid stream flowing amid charred unsightly rocks.

2. *That there was no deceit in His mouth.* He was no deceiver, though He was regarded and treated as one. He was perfectly candid and sincere, true and holy. He was in all respects what He professed to be, and He imposed on no one by any false and unfounded claim (Heb. vii. 26; 1 Pet. ii. 22). Duplicity, craft, and deceit are the accustomed methods of false teachers. He neither pandered to the rich nor flattered the poor. When in the greatest peril, He adopts no ingenious arguments nor methods for escape. All He said was plain, undisguised, unclouded, bold. He never disguised His abhorrence of falsehood. He did not promise more than He intended to perform. He did not hide from His followers the consequences of their position: "Ye must be hated," &c. None of His enemies could take up that challenge of His, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" The judge that tried Him declared, "I find no fault in Him," and the centurion that executed Him professed that "certainly He was a righteous man."

Thus, by Divine arrangement, Jesus received such honourable treatment immediately after His ignominious death as a vindication of His spotless character.

III. PRACTICAL LESSONS SUGGESTED BY THE HONOURABLE BURIAL OF JESUS.

1. *The character of Jesus is unique.* He stands alone among men. He was spotlessly pure in the midst of universal pollution. Then He must be something more than a mere man. "Truly this is THE SON OF GOD." How admirably qualified is He to act as our substitute, and to present a sacrifice for our sin! Had He been guilty of a single sin, what could He have done for us? of what merit His obedience? of what value His death? of what efficacy His intercession?

2. *The purity of Jesus in word and deed should be sought by us.* Here on earth, in flesh and blood, and under the conditions to which men in general are subject, He exhibited a perfect character, and so stands before us as a true, complete, and universal pattern and example. We are commanded to be imitators of Him (Eph. v. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 21). Let us follow Him as if we trod exactly behind Him. Let there be the closest imitation. Take heed to your deceitful heart (Ps. xxxii. 2). Guard against deceit of mouth (Ps. cxx. 3), and deceit in practice, &c. If we suffer, let us be careful that it shall not be on account of our faults. Let us seek grace so to live as not to deserve the reproaches of others, and to be able to bear them with patience if we are called to suffer them. The purity of Jesus can never be congenial to us until our hearts are regenerated.

3. *The burial of Jesus should divest the grave of its terror.* These bodies of ours must fail and faint and die, and go down to the cold grave to return to their native dust. What then? Shall we who are "risen with Christ," dread to rest where He Him-

self lay? Shall we fear to be consigned to the place in which He, who is the "resurrection and the life," reposed? Shall we doubt that He will bring us forth in triumph from the dominion of the grave; that He will clothe us with a body all beauteous and immortal like His own, &c.? The darkness of the grave is the forerunner of the unparalleled brightness of the resurrection life. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay," and learn to view without fear your own final resting-place, and rejoice in the assurance that His resurrection is the pledge and earnest of your own.—*A. Tucker.*

Expiation.

liii. 10. *Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin.*

Both Jews and Gentiles knew pretty well what "an offering for sin" meant. The Gentiles had been in the habit of offering sacrifices. The Jews, however, had by far the clearer idea of it. What was meant by a sin-offering? . . . This was always the idea of a sin-offering—a perfect victim taking the place of the offender.

Christ has been made by God an offering for sin. Oh, that we may be able to do in reality what the Jew did in symbol! May we put our hand upon the head of Christ Jesus; as we see Him offered up upon the cross for guilty men, may we know that our sins are transferred to Him!

I. Sin deserves and demands punishment.

Some say that there is no reason in sin itself why it should be punished, but that God punishes offences for the sake of society at large. This is what is called the governmental theory—that it is necessary for the maintenance of good order that an offender should be punished, but that there is nothing in sin itself which absolutely requires a penalty. Now, we assert, and we believe we have God's warrant for it, that sin intrinsically and in itself demands and deserves the just anger of God, and that that anger should be displayed in the form of a punishment. To establish this, let me appeal to the conscience, not of a man who has, by years of sin, dwindled it down to the very lowest degree, but of an awakened sinner under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Ask this man, who is now really in the possession of his true senses, whether he believes that sin deserves punishment, and his answer will be quick, sharp, and decisive—"Deserve it? Ay, indeed; and the wonder is that I have not suffered it. I feel that if God should smite me now, without hope or offer of mercy, to the lowest hell, I should only have what I justly deserve; and I feel that if I be not punished for my sins, or if there be not some plan found by which my sin can be punished in another, I cannot understand how God can be just at all. How shall He be the Judge of all the earth if He suffer offences to go unpunished?" There has been a dispute whether men have any innate ideas, but surely this idea is in us as early as anything, that virtue deserves reward, and sin deserves punishment. Add to this, that God has absolutely declared His displeasure against sin itself (Jer. xliv. 4; Deut. xxv. 16, &c.). There is nothing more clear in Scripture than the truth that sin is in itself so detestable to God that He must and will put forth His tremendous strength to crush it, and to make the offender feel that it is an evil and a bitter thing to offend against the Most High (H. E. I., 2281, 2282).

The other idea, that sin is only to be punished for the sake of the community, involves injustice. If I am to be damned for the sake of other people, I demur to it. If my sin intrinsically deserves the wrath of God, and I am sent to perdition as the result of this fact, I have nothing to say. Conscience binds my tongue. But if I am told that I am only sent there as a part of a scheme of moral government, and

that I am sent into torment to impress others with a sense of right, I ask that some one else should have the place of preacher to the people, and that I may be one of those whose felicity it shall be to be preached to, for I see no reason in justice why I should be selected as the victim. Really, when men run away from the simplicities of the Gospel in order to make Jehovah more kind, it is strange how unjust and unkind they make Him.

The reverse of this doctrine, that sin demands punishment, may be used to prove it, for it is highly immoral, dangerous, and opens the flood-gates of licentiousness to teach that sin can go unpunished. If sin deserve not to be punished, what is Tophet but injustice on a monstrous scale? Go and preach this in hell, and you will have quenched the fire which is for ever to burn, and the worm of conscience will die. And then come to earth, and go, like Jonah went, though with another message than Jonah carried, through the streets and thoroughfares of the exceeding great city, and proclaim that sin is not to be punished for its own intrinsic desert and baseness. But, if you expect your prophecy to be believed, enlarge the number of your jails, and seek for fresh fields for transportation in the interests of society; for if any doctrine can breed villains, this will.

It is written clearly upon the conscience of every one of us, that sin must be punished. Here are you and I brought into this dilemma—we have sinned, and we must be punished for it: it is impossible, absolutely, that sin can be forgiven without a sacrifice: God must be just, if heaven falls. But God, in His infinite wisdom, has devised a way by which justice can be satisfied, and yet mercy be triumphant. Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, took upon Himself the form of man, and offered unto divine justice that which was accepted as an equivalent for the punishment due to all His people.

II. THE PROVISION AND ACCEPTANCE OF A SUBSTITUTE FOR SINNERS IS AN ACT OF GRACE.

It is no act of grace for a person to accept a pecuniary debt on my behalf of another person. If I owe a man twenty pounds, it is no matter to him who shall pay the twenty pounds, so long as it is paid. But it is not so in penal matters. If a man be condemned to be imprisoned, there is no law, no justice which can compel the lawgiver to accept a substitute for him. If the sovereign should permit another to suffer in his stead, it must be the sovereign's own act and deed; he must use his own discretion as to whether he will accept the substitute or not, and if he do so, it is an act of grace. In God's case, if He had said, in the infinite sovereignty of His absolute will, "I will have no substitute, but each man shall suffer for himself, he who sinneth shall die," none could have murmured. It was grace, and only grace which led God to say, "I will accept a substitute."

This grace of God is yet further magnified in the providing of such a substitute as Christ—on Christ's part that He should give up Himself, the prince of life, to die; the king of glory to be despised and rejected of men. Think of the unexampled love which shines in Christ's gift of Himself. But the Father gives the Son (John iii. 16). To give your wealth is something, if you make yourself poor, but to give your child is something more. I implore you, do not look upon the sacrifice of Christ as an act of mere vengeance on the Father's part. Never imagine that Jesus died to make the Father complacent towards us. Jesus' death is the effect of overwhelming and infinite love on the Father's part. Never indulge the atrocious thought that there was justice, and justice only here; but magnify the love and pity of God in that He did devise and accomplish the great plan of salvation by an atoning sacrifice (H. E. I. 390, 2319–2321).

III. JESUS IS THE MOST FITTING PERSON TO BE A SUBSTITUTE, AND HIS WORK IS THE MOST FITTING WORK TO BE A SATISFACTION.

Consider what sort of a mediator

was needed. He must be one who had no debt of his own. If Christ had been at all under the law naturally, if it had been His duty to do what it is our duty to do, it is plain He could only have lived for Himself; and if He had any sin of His own, He could only have died for Himself, seeing His obligations to do and to suffer would have been His just due to the righteousness and the vengeance of God. Jesus Christ was perfectly exempt from service, and therefore could volunteer to undertake it for our sake.

There was needed, also, one of the same nature with us. Such was Jesus Christ. For this purpose He became man. Made in all points like unto us, being a man, and standing exactly in a man's place, becoming a real Adam, standing quite in the first Adam's place, He was a fit person to become a substitute for us.

The dignity of His sacred person made Him the most proper substitute. A mere man could at most be a substitute for one other man. Crush him as you will, and make him feel in his life every pang which flesh is heir to, but he can only suffer what one man would have suffered. He could not even then have suffered an equivalent for that eternal misery which the ungodly deserve; and if he were a mere man, he must suffer precisely the same. A difference may be made in the penalty, when there is a difference in the person, but if the person be the same, the penalty must be exactly the same in degree and quality. But the dignity of the Son of God, the dignity of His nature, changes the whole matter; it puts such a singular efficacy into every groan and every pang, that it needs not that His pang should be eternal, or that He should die a second death; it adds a special force to the substitution, and thus one bleeding Saviour can make atonement for millions of sinful men, and the Captain of our salvation can bring multitudes unto glory.

One other condition needs to be fulfilled. The person so free from personal service, and so truly in our nature, and yet so exalted in person, *should also be accepted and ordained of God.* Our text gives this a full solution, in that it says, "*He* shall make His soul an offering for sin." Christ did not make Himself a sin-offering without a warrant from the Most High: God made Him so. "The *Lord* hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

IV. CHRIST'S WORK AND THE EFFECTS OF THAT WORK ARE NOW COMPLETE.

Christ has made an atonement so complete that He never need suffer again. The death-knell of the penalty rings in the dying words of the Saviour, "It is finished." Do you ask for a proof of this? Remember that Christ rose again from the dead. If he had not completed His work of penalty-suffering, He would have been left in the tomb till now. More than that; He has ascended up on high. Think you He would have returned thither with unexpiated sin red upon His garments? Do you suppose He would have ascended to the rest and to the reward of an accomplished work?

Complete also in its effects. There is now complete pardon for every soul which believeth in Christ. You need not do anything to make the atonement of Christ sufficient to pardon you. It wants no ekeing out—pardon, full and free, is now presented in the name of Jesus, proclaimed to every creature under heaven.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 561.

THE ATONEMENT.

liii. 10. *When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, &c.*

I. THE SOUL OF THE MESSIAH WAS TO BE MADE AN OFFERING FOR SIN.

The word here used (אָשָׁם, *asham*) signifies either guilty,—or, by a figure, an offering for guilt. We may con-

sider it in both senses. He was not in Himself guilty, but innocent and perfectly so (2 Cor. v. 21; Heb. vii. 26). But our sins were imputed to Him, or "laid upon Him;" that is, they were laid to His charge, and He was made accountable for them (Isa. liii. 6; 1 Pet. ii. 24); "made a curse" (Gal. iii. 13). Hence He was made an offering for guilt. Two things were to be done, that the glory of God might be fully displayed, in the redemption of man. Sin must be pardoned, otherwise the sinner could not be saved. It was necessary also it should be punished; otherwise, its evil could not appear, nor the Divine attributes escape impeachment; the law of God, which had forbidden sin, must be magnified, or the equity of His government asserted. Sin must, therefore, be pardoned in a way that marks and publishes the evil of the offence. The sacrifice of bulls and goats, or of any creature inferior to man, was insufficient for this purpose (Heb. x. 4). Nor could any man atone for his own sins, or suffer a punishment adequate to their demerit, without suffering eternally, and to the utmost extent of his capacity, much less could one man atone for many, or many for all. It was necessary, therefore, one should suffer, who, although possessed of human nature, yet had a nature superior to man, who could bear unlimited sufferings—sufferings adequate to the demerit of all human offences, in a limited time. This the Messiah did, whose Godhead supported His manhood, and enabled Him to bear, partly in His body, and especially in His soul, an anguish so great as might give not only men, but angels, a proper view of the evil and bitterness of sin, and the purity, justice, and wrath of God, in hating, condemning, and punishing it. No mere bodily sufferings could do this, and, therefore, "His soul" was made "an offering for sin." (See Matt. xxvi. 36–45. Comp. Mark xiv. 34–36: Luke xxii. 41–44).

II. BY WHOM IT WAS TO BE MADE AN OFFERING.

By the Father; "when Thou," &c. (vers. 6, 10). It was done by His "determinate counsel" (Acts ii. 23). This does not excuse those who became the instruments of His death. It was God who required an offering for sin; His purity, His justice, His truth, the authority of His law, the rights of His government required it. His glory demanded it, as a consideration on account of which He might pardon sin, and save the sinner with honour to Himself (Rom. viii. 3; iii. 25, 26). God provided it in mercy and love to mankind (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9, 10; Tit. iii. 4). He provided even His own Son to be made flesh, to be poor, despised, afflicted, to die in ignominy and torture, for men who were sinners, enemies, rebels! (Rom. v. 6–10).

III. THE EFFECTS WHICH SHOULD BE PRODUCED.

1. "He shall see His seed,"—a numerous race of sons and daughters begotten by the Gospel among Jews and Gentiles (ch. liv. 1; liii. 8; Psalm cx. 3).

2. "He shall prolong His days." His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation are here alluded to, whereby He obtained an everlasting life at God's right hand (Psalm xxi. 4). The end of it is threefold: (1.) For a recompense of His own labours and sufferings (Phil. ii. 9). (2.) For the salvation of His seed, whose Prophet, Priest, and King; whose wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; whose Saviour, Protector, Judge, Rewarder, &c., He thus becomes (Matt. xxv. 34). (3.) For the judgment, condemnation, and punishment of those that reject Him, and are not His seed (Matt. xxv. 41; Psalm. cx. 1; Heb. x. 13; 1 Cor. xv. 25).

3. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." By "the pleasure of the Lord" is intended the progress of truth and goodness, of wisdom, holiness, and happiness in the world, the advancement of God's glory, and the salvation of mankind, the felicity of the righteous, and the destruction of the wicked.

4. Hence we need not wonder that "He sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied."

INFERENCES.—1. Was it necessary that Christ should be made "an offering for sin?" How great, then, is its evil! How dreadful its effects! It is of so heinous a nature that its guilt could not be expiated, so that it might be pardoned, consistently with the Divine perfections, without the sacrifice of so glorious a person. How great, then, will be the punishment of those in the other world, who, by rejecting or neglecting this sacrifice, are not saved from sin? 2. Are God's holiness and justice so inviolable, and His law so honourable, and the rights of His government so sacred, that such a sacrifice was required for the manifestation of His glory? Then, what a powerful call and motive have we here for reverence and fear, solemnity and awe! 3. Did God judge it proper that such a price as this should be paid for man's redemption? Then, how important, how valuable are the souls of men! 4. Has the Father provided such an atonement? And is it actually made? Then, how great, how astonishing, His mercy and love! What a foundation is laid for confidence in Him, and love to Him in return (Rom. viii. 32; v. 9, 10). 5. Has God been thus kind and bountiful? Then what a loud call upon your gratitude! 6. Shall the pleasure of the Lord prosper in His hands? Then, if it be your anxiety to know, experience, and do the will of the Lord, you may commit your cause to Him. 7. Are you His seed? If so, rejoice; for He has prolonged His days for your benefit. If not, tremble; for He is your Judge. 8. Does He see of the travail of His soul, and is He satisfied? Then, sympathise with Him in His sufferings and His satisfaction. Being conformed to the motives and ends for which He suffered and died on our behalf, let us become instances of the efficacy of His gracious undertaking and objects of His joy, in consequence of it (Tit. ii. 14).—*Joseph Benson: Sermons*, vol. i. p. 236–243

I. A DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM THAT NEEDS TO BE EXPLAINED.

1. Christ died in the room of sinners. Not as the death of an individual may be the occasion of benefit to others, but by a legal substitution. 2. He died to satisfy Divine justice. Not to satisfy any thirst of vengeance in the Father, but to satisfy His justice, which requires Him to punish sin as sin, and not merely for its consequences. 3. He died to expiate human guilt. Man is guilty or liable to punishment for sin. He has a sense of guilt latent or awakened. The death of Christ is intended to deliver him from his guilt, and to remove the sense of guilt from his conscience. 4. He died to propitiate the Divine favour. Wrath against sin is not incompatible with love. It is infinite abhorrence of sin, and an inflexible determination to punish it. It is displayed in the cross of Christ. The death of Christ averts it from all who believe in Him.

II. AN EXPEDIENT OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT THAT NEEDS TO BE VINDICATED.

1. It is said that God, as a being of infinite love, might forgive sin without atonement. Perhaps He might, if sin were a personal insult or a debt. It is a crime, a violation of law, rebellion against legitimate authority. It must be punished before it can be pardoned. 2. It is said that atonement involves the substitution of the innocent for the guilty, which is cruel and unjust. Admit that Christ was innocent, and His death presents a problem of which the doctrine of the atonement is the only satisfactory solution. It was voluntary. 3. It is said that atonement is inconsistent with grace. All is grace to the sinner. 4. It is said that atonement is subversive of the interests of morality. It has a man-ward as well as a God-ward aspect. It exercises a moral influence. It supplies the strongest motive-power that was ever brought to bear on the formation of character (H. E. I., 396–398).

III. A REMEDY FOR THE ILLS OF MEN THAT NEEDS TO BE APPLIED.

1. The atonement unappropriated

will not avail any one. It does not operate mechanically or magically. Many will perish although Christ has died. 2. The benefits of the atonement are offered to all. There are no limitations in the offer. "To you, O men, I call." 3. The benefits of the atonement are conferred on all who believe on Christ. Faith is a condition of human nature rather than of the Gospel. Man is a voluntary being, having the power of choice. He must choose Christ as his Saviour; trust in His ability and His willingness to save; rest on His finished work. He must receive Him, or be undone for ever. —*G. Brooks: Outlines*, p. 91-93.

I. *The atonement of Christ was necessary to save the guilty.* Denied by some, who say, "God can pardon sin as easily as a father pardons a disobedient child;" and further contend that for God to require an atonement in order to forgive would be an act of unnecessary severity. But God is not only the "Father of mercies;" He is also the moral governor of the universe. He has a public character to sustain, and in His public character He could not consistently pardon sin without an atonement, any more than could a judge on the bench pardon a guilty criminal when the law required that he should be punished. God is a just as well as a merciful Being; and would not, and could not, sacrifice one attribute to the exaltation of another (Rom. v. 21).

II. *The atonement of Christ was not designed to make God merciful, but to open up an honourable way for Him to show mercy.* It is a grievous mistake to represent God the Father, all justice, and God the Son, all mercy, and to suppose that by the sacrifice of Christ God the Father was influenced to become merciful. "God is love," &c. Besides, the great design of saving man originated with God the Father as such. It was from His love and mercy that He gave His Son to die for sinners (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9, 10). Christ's death did not make Him merciful, but opened up an honourable way for showing mercy (see pp. 92, 93).

III. *The atonement of Christ was an expedient in the government of God that would answer the same end as the eternal punishment of the transgressor.* The law of God requires that the transgressor should die; had we been left to perish like fallen angels, His justice and holiness would have been eternally glorified. But all that Divine justice required is done by the substitution of Christ in the sinner's place.

IV. *The atonement of Christ must not be considered as a commercial affair, but as a moral act.* It is an error to represent sin literally as a *debt*: it is a *crime*. Those texts which speak of it as a debt must not be taken literally but *figuratively*. If sin were merely a debt it would not be so aggravated in its nature as it really is: a crime against the high authority of heaven. Further, if it were a debt, God could pardon it without a sacrifice, as easily as a creditor can forgive a debtor, if disposed so to do. Christ's atonement is not a pecuniary payment of debt, but a moral satisfaction to the Lawgiver to atone for a crime (1 Pet. i. 18, 20; H. E. I. 383).

V. *The atonement of Christ is an arrangement that protects the character of God, and establishes His government even while pardoning sinners.* The character of God must stand unimpeached and unimpeachable, and His government must stand on the unalterable laws of truth and justice. Now, by the sacrifice of Christ sin appears exceedingly sinful, the justice of God stands out in all its awful glory, and the government of Jehovah (or His moral influence over His creatures) appears stronger than if men had never sinned, or if, after sinning, they had been eternally punished. All the perfections of God harmonise even while forgiving believing sinners (Ps. lxxxv. 10, 11).

VI. *The atonement of Christ was not designed to save us in our sin, but from it, and all its dreadful consequences.* It leads not to licentiousness, as some affirm (Rom. iii. 8), but the reverse, since it gives stronger motives for

obedience. We fear sin, not only because we fear hell, but because we see how awful a thing it is, in the death of Christ. We hate sin, not merely because it ruined us, but because it caused Him so much suffering. We obey God, not merely as creatures, but from love as redeemed sinners (Matt. i. 21; Gal. vi. 14).

VII. *The atonement of Christ was not made for few only, but for many.* Such is the aggravation of sin, that it would have been equally necessary for Christ to have suffered as He did, if but one sinner were to be saved. His atonement is equally sufficient for all that believe (1 John ii. 1, 2).

VIII. *There is no defect or insufficiency in the atonement of Christ to save any who believe.* If we are not saved, it will not be from any want of virtue in the atonement of Christ, but for not believing in Him for salvation (John iii. 18; Mark xvi. 16). Have we received the atonement, or rather, reconciliation through the atonement? (Rom. v. 11.)—*Studies for the Pulpit* part 1, pp. 467–469.

The Mystery of Christ's Death.

I. It was the good pleasure of God. His eternal, wise, gracious purpose. II. It was an offering for sin. Life for life. To expiate guilt. By Divine appointment. III. It is the source of inexhaustible wonders of grace and glory. A holy seed. A mysterious life. A triumphant work.—*J. Lyth D.D.*

Messiah Contemplating His Spiritual Offspring.

liii. 10. *He shall see His seed.*

Observing that Messiah, though He did no sin, suffered even unto death—astonished while they read of an incarnate, obedient, and expiring God, many will ever be ready to inquire, Why, and for what great purpose, was it so? To all such questions, this chapter, nay, this verse, enables us to reply. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, &c." A part of the high remuneration is set forth in these few short words—"He shall see His seed."

I. **He shall see them all born and brought in.** To Him they are children of sure promise (Rom. ix. 8; Gal. iv. 28); He is acquainted with them individually. Messiah's offspring may differ much at different times, in respect of the measure of its increase. Now, it may be slow; anon, it may be rapid; but at all times, and in all places, the measure of its increase will just accord with His own expectation (Ps. cxlv. 4; xxii. 30, 31).

II. **He shall see them all educated and brought up.** The practical object is to imbue them with the spirit of children. Great varieties may exist as to their talents, &c.; but in one thing they are all alike (Jer. xxiv. 7). Of their education, Messiah Himself has the principal charge (ch. liv. 13); and the means He employs are worthy of Him, for He instructs them by the truth of His word, by the light of His Spirit, and by the events of His providence. The charge is weighty, but it is His pleasant work. In evidence of this, He invites them to His school, arguing with them from the attractions of His own character, and the blessedness of such as are under His tuition (Matt. xi. 28–30; Prov. viii. 32–34). "Experience," it is said, "is the best schoolmaster;" let us, therefore, listen to one who, being at once proficient in the learning of his time, and a partaker of heavenly wisdom, could compare and contrast the two (Phil. iii. 8).

III. **He shall see them all supported and brought through.** God's rich providence is their inheritance for a present world; His sure promise is their charter for a better; and for all their work and warfare, there is more than enough in the wisdom, grace, and strength that are in Christ Jesus. The history of Messiah's offspring is full of illustrations of this.

IV. He shall see them all perfected and brought home. As Christ Himself was made a perfect Saviour by the sufferings which He underwent, even so His honour requires, and it belongs to His office, that He confer on all His offspring a perfect salvation. With this view He has appointed His Church for the perfecting of the saints, &c. The Bible speaks of a future and fixed period, which it significantly styles the "manifestation of the sons of God," and the "coming of Christ with all His saints." Home! delightful word to such as have sojourned in a land of strangers. Home! where? To the house not made with hands—to the prepared city, which is also the city of habitation. With what rapture and triumph will Messiah exclaim in the presence of His great Father, and before an assembled universe—"Behold I, and the children whom God hath given Me!" This is a home of which Messiah shall not be ashamed; it will do Him infinite honour. Nor is this all: arrived at home, their ineffable and inconceivable felicity is to be absolutely without end.

CONCLUSION.—Our subject shows that Messiah's glory is inseparably bound up with the happiness of His offspring; that the application is not less certain than the purchase of redemption; it contains a seasonable and powerful antidote against undue depression in the Church (Rom. ix. 26); it shows, also, that it is our duty and our honour to concur, after our measure, in carrying this scripture into effect.—*Robert Muter, D.D.: Weekly Christian Teacher*, vol. ii. pp. 713–718.

THE IMMORTAL HIGH PRIEST.

liii. 10. *He shall prolong His days.* Heb. vii. 15, 16, 25.

In these passages we have, first in Hebrew prophecy, and then in Christian teaching, the doctrine of the enduring life of the Christ after His sufferings are over. The Old Testament prophet sees from afar the new life of the Messiah, in a blaze of glory. The New Testament prophet declares the life already begun, and indicates the purposes for which that life is being spent as well as the glory with which it is crowned.

I. *The Lord Jesus now lives as the Priest upon His throne.* Calvary's night is over. The Christ is not here, He is risen. He has entered "within the veil," there to appear in the presence of God for us, and is now the "Apostle and High Priest of our confession." His atoning work was finished on earth once for all,—His administrative work is being carried on in perpetuity—sustaining a like relation to the work accomplished by His death, that God's upholding of all things does to His first acts of creative power.

II. *The supreme fitness of Christ for this vast work, is owing to His possessing all the power of an indissoluble life.* The word "endless" is inadequate; *it* merely signifies a life that will not end. But the word in the original signifies a life that *cannot* end;—one that is and must be perpetuated, by virtue of its own inherent energy and power. With whatever devotion and care the high-priest might bear the concerns of the Israel of God on his heart, and with whatever skill he might administer Israel's affairs, he must sooner or later resign the office, and give it up to another, when death called him away. But the life that resides in that Christ whom God raised from the dead, is a *life* infinitely full of spontaneous, self-sustaining energy, not dependent on aught without for its maintenance. There is within it no cause of decay; there is no wasting of energy, however much is spent; no outside power can weaken or obstruct that glorious life. It has in it all Divine perfections to the full—strength, wisdom, intelli-

gence, fidelity, and love—each and all of these being "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever!" That life which is dependent on none, is the life on which all things depend! Since His life can never be weakened by decay from within, or imperilled by assaults from without—*time*, which makes other power to crumble, does but give grander scope for the manifestation of His. Kings, thrones, and empires, may rise up, flourish, decline, pass away, and be succeeded by others, and yet the power of Christ's endless life shall be "ever new, ever young,"

> "And firm endure, while endless years
> Their everlasting circles run."

III. *Because Christ's life is indissoluble, His Priesthood cannot change hands.* Long as the human race shall need an Advocate with God, Jesus will be that Advocate to interpose on their behalf. He ever liveth *with a view to intercession.* Can we frame to ourselves an intelligible conception of the method of this Redeemer's interposition? There seem to be four things involved in it. (1.) Christ *appears* in the presence of God *for us;* the seer beholds Him like a Lamb as it had been slain, bearing the marks of Calvary's work—marks full of their own infinite meaning—how He has borne away the sins of the world. As that offering was well pleasing to God *then*, so it ever will be; neither its meaning nor its worth can change throughout eternity. (2.) Christ *pleads* in the presence of God, continuing there for sinners the plea He urged on the Cross; continuing for those who believe on Him His wondrous intercessory prayer! (3.) He *acts* in the presence of God for us: "I go *to prepare a place for you.*" The Son of God prepares a place for us, while the Spirit of God is preparing us for the place. (4.) He is *governing* for us—He is Head over all things to the Church. All things are working together *for* good to them that love God, *because* their working is in our Redeemer's hands.

IV. *The effect of a priesthood that is unchanging, is a redemption that is unvarying.* Because of the Redeemer's sway in heaven, the work of salvation is advancing on earth.

V. This great Redeemer ever living, this great Redemption being unvarying, is *the guarantee of the salvation being carried on to the uttermost!* Who can set forth all that that glorious phrase means? (1.) This Saviour can reach to the uttermost depth of sin and guilt and misery. His sacrifice, appropriated by faith, can cause the highest pile of guilt to disappear for ever. His power can eradicate the most inveterate and apparently hopeless corruption. The hardest heart can be melted down by Jesus' love—to the uttermost. (2.) Jesus can reach souls through the uttermost extent of His domain. No human spirit can be too far off for contact with Jesus. (3.) However varied the demands which may be made on the saved one at any moment. Christ can help to the uttermost (H. E. I. 934, 945). Though the longer each believer lives, the greater will be his demands on his Saviour, he cannot overtax Him. This bank can be drawn upon to the uttermost, and yet be rich as ever! (4.) Christ's salvation can lay hold of every part of our nature. Body, soul, and spirit; all will be sanctified by Him. (5.) Christ's salvation will reach to the uttermost point of time. (6.) However believers may multiply—let myriads on myriads be added to the roll, for myriads on myriads of ages—the salvation will be large enough and strong enough for all, even to the uttermost! (7.) Believers shall be gathered unto Christ: all presented to Him, a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Then, when they are without fault before the throne of God, they will have proved the truth of *salvation to the uttermost!* No. I am wrong. They will not have proved it; they will be proving it still, for, when they reach that point which is now *the "uttermost"* of our conception, *that* goal of glory will be but a starting point for eternity!—*Clement Clemance, D.D.: The Christian Era*, vol. i. pp 39, 40.

The Divine Purpose Fulfilled.

(Missionary Discourse.)

liii. 10. *The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.*

Some have affirmed that this chapter relates to the mission of Jeremiah, and to the hostile treatment he had to encounter in performing it; some that it sets forth the approaching downfall and subsequent exaltation of the Jewish nation; some that it refers entirely to the history of the Messiah. The former two of these interpretations have been suggested only under the influence of mental perversion, and are utterly untenable. The last is confirmed by the best evidence that can be afforded. Philip declared that this prophecy referred to Jesus (Acts viii. 35). On several occasions in the New Testament the prophecy is expressly announced as having been fulfilled in Christ. The whole course of the Saviour's life, and the circumstances associated with His final sufferings and death, correspond so exactly with the description given by the prophet, that had he been a personal witness of that course and of these circumstances, his statements could not have been more accurate or more striking.

I. God has formed a purpose of mercy toward mankind. "The pleasure of the Lord" (Eph. i. 9; ii. 11). His purpose was—1. Formed before the foundations of the earth were laid. 2. Manifested on earth as soon as the need of mercy existed, in the promise made to our first parents even on the day that they sinned. 3. Unfolded more and more clearly to patriarchs and prophets. 4. Fully disclosed in the Christian economy.

II. The fulfilment of this purpose of mercy is committed to the Lord Jesus. The pleasure of the Lord is in His hand. It was He to whom the first promise referred (Gen. iii. 15); of whom Abraham was informed (Gen. xxvi. 4); whose coming Jacob anticipated (Gen. xlix. 10); and of whom Moses and all the prophets wrote and spoke (Deut. xviii. 18, &c.). The Lord Jesus performs the purpose of mercy—1. By His atonement for human sin. 2. By the communication of the Holy Spirit, by whose influence men are brought to a cordial reception of the Saviour's meritorious work, so as to render that work their own.

III. Under the administration of the Lord Jesus the purpose of mercy shall be perfectly and triumphantly accomplished. Every Divine purpose is certain to be accomplished (Isa. xlvi. 9–11; Ps. xxxiii. 11). But apart from this general reason, the certainty of the accomplishment of the work which has been entrusted to the Lord Jesus rests,

1. On *His own character*. It is essentially Divine. His proper Deity imparts to His atoning sacrifice an absolute fulness of merit, and renders failure in His work impossible.

2. On *the Divine assurance solemnly pledged to that effect* (Isa. liii. 10, 11; Phil. ii. 9–11; John xii. 32; Heb. xii. 12, 13).

Application. God has formed a purpose of mercy toward mankind. Hence—1. Those theologies are false which represent God as a God of vengeance. In the Scriptures He appears in consistency with all His perfections as the God of love. The redemption of our race is His "pleasure."

2. The perfect unity of the Father with the Son is exemplified in the entrustment of this work to the Son. He came into the world, and "made His soul an offering for sin," not to change the Father's purposes but to fulfil them (see p. 92).

3. If we sympathise with this purpose, which God cherished from all eternity, and in the fulness of time entrusted to Christ for its accomplishment, let us show that we do so by making known to all nations the glad tidings of His grace. If we cannot personally carry to perishing men the good news, let us do our utmost to send it.—*James Parsons: Christian World Pulpit*, i. 440

All Things in Christ's Hand.

Isa. liii. 10. *The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.*

I. What things are put into Christ's hand?

The Father is here, as everywhere else in Scripture, looked on as the originator and disposer of all things. The Son is the medium through whom, and for whom things come to be what they are, and come to be arranged as they are. At least, one reason why all things are put into Christ's hand is,—the great love of the Father towards Him. Ere Christ made His appearance into this world, there had been a sublime transaction between the Father and the Son, in which vast affairs had been entrusted on the one hand and accepted on the other. For the knowledge of this we are indebted to revelation alone. *All things* are put into Christ's hand.

1. *Creation is put into Christ's* hand (John i.; Col. i.; Heb. i.). Here, Christ, as the Son of the Father, is very clearly marked off from ought that is created, by being distinctly declared to be, Himself, the Creator. The Father, indeed, appoints, and the Son executes, the Father's appointment. Subordination of *office* is perfectly consistent with equality of *nature* (see p. 83). And if we would seize the most adequate view of our Divine Lord which it is possible for us to attain unto, we must let all the Scriptures concerning Him have their right place and power. All creation was formed and is upheld by our Redeemer's hand!

2. *Revelation is also put into His hand.* God speaks to us in His Son. When we speak of the work of *creation* being Christ's, we speak of that which includes *all* worlds. But here, when revelation is our theme, we have to do, *so far as we know,* with only one world. Not, indeed, that there are not *hints* in the Word of God, that the Son is the revealer of the Father to other worlds than this. On earth, Christ is the clearest and brightest beam of glory that is let down from heaven for us to see! We see in Him, One in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily!"

3. But we must limit our field of thought yet again. It might have been that Jesus had been a revelation of God to this world, quite irrespective of any element of sin. But where sin is, a declaration of what God is, is not enough. If relations of friendship and love are to be established between a holy God and sinful men, it must be in such a way as shall clear the holy throne from all compromise with sin, and as shall make even those who are conscious of guilt feel at home in the blaze of pure and holy love. It was reserved for Christ to institute these gracious relations between us and heaven. *Mediation is put into Christ's* hand. He is the way along which the penitent may come and hold converse with the great Supreme! And, owing to sin, His mediation involved not only an incarnation, but expiation. Christ, owing to the twofoldness of His nature, could make an offering which should be effective as towards God, and suitable as towards man. The Father loveth the Son, and hath put *expiation* into His hand!

4. Creation, revelation, mediation. Two more steps have yet to be taken. A power is needed to ensure that the mediation shall not fail through men refusing to accept it. Such a power is lodged in Christ. He gives the Spirit to convict and to renew. And by His own living energy bestowed through the Holy Ghost, He will regenerate the sinner and perfect the saint. This great work of *the conquest and training of hearts is put into His hand!*

5. *The administration of the affairs of the globe on behalf of the Church* is put into His hand. He is now a Priest upon His throne. He is the King and

Lord of His Church. He builds up that Church by the word of truth and by the Spirit of His grace. He watches over the Church everywhere in this world, presides over the departure of every soul, and governs the "spacious world unseen" with a view to the judgment day. "He died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."

6. *The consummation of all things* is put into His hand. He who sent Peter to gather in the first-fruits, will send forth His angels to reap when the harvest of the earth is ripe. Then the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, when, for all believers, He shall have conquered death, having raised them up at the last day. Then the redeemed shall be gathered home from all lands, shall be without spot before the throne of God, and presented before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Then shall our Saviour have manifested the wisdom of the Father in putting all things into His hand; He shall everlastingly have proved His infinite capacity for the trust; and then shall Christ and His Church be glorified together.

II. WHAT IS THE PRACTICAL BEARING OF THIS THEME?

1. We see that Christ's work *in saving us*, is but part of a vast, boundless, infinite scheme of glory and of grandeur which it will take ages on ages to develop and reveal!

2. We see a reason why every preacher should follow the example of John the Baptist, and point *away from himself to Christ* (John iii. 26–35).

3. We see the imperativeness of insisting on the Lordship of Christ over men and nations. Governments only lay up sorrow for themselves if they contravene the holy will of Christ.

4. We see why we must point to Jesus only as the exclusive object of a sinner's trust.

5. We see the security of the redemption of those who are in Christ.

6. We see the certainty of the ruin of those who persist in rebelling against Christ.—*Clemant Clemance, D.D.: The Christian Era*, vol. ii. p. 41, &c.

OUR SAVIOUR SUFFERING, SATISFIED, TRIUMPHANT.

Iiii. 10, 11. *When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin. . . . He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.*

I. *The aspect in which that work of the Saviour by which He accomplished the redemption of the world is here represented:* "The travail of His soul." The New Testament teaches that the Saviour's sufferings were—1. *Sacrificial and expiatory.* 2. *Voluntary.* The first clause of the text should read: "When His soul shall make an offering for sin." 3. *Most intense and awful.* (α).

II. *The nature of that sublime and heavenly satisfaction described in this passage, as accruing to the Redeemer from witnessing the effect of His work and sufferings in the salvation of men.*

1. It is the satisfaction arising from enlarged success of a pleasure always proportionate to the difficulties of the task we have fulfilled, and to the zeal with which it has been prosecuted.

2. It is the satisfaction of most pure and exalted benevolence. No joy can be compared with the peaceful and exquisite delight arising from this principle, when it is effectual in the mitigation of calamity or the removal of necessity or danger (β).

3. It is such as springs from contemplating the greatness, the importance, and the difficulties of the work itself. Salvation is an illustrious and an arduous work. The obstacles that present themselves in the way of its accomplishment are, to all but the power of God, insuperable.

4. It is to be estimated only by the perfection of the Saviour's knowledge.

relative to the whole progress and issue of that event which he so joyously contemplates.

5. It arises principally from the peculiar relation of His character and work to the event itself and to all its consequences (γ).

III. *The certainty that this satisfaction shall be finally realised.* This is certain, because the most unlimited diffusion of Christianity throughout the world is certain. We cherish this confidence —1. Because of the natural attraction and influence of the great doctrine of the atonement, which forms the very substance of the Gospel (δ).

2. Because of the tendency of the Gospel to an unlimited and ceaseless diffusion. This characteristic was exhibited in the age of its first promulgation. It still continues, for in every heart in which the Gospel is truly received it kindles a strong desire to make it known to others. Wherever it is received, it blesses men in temporal as well as in spiritual things.

3. Because of its resistless and triumphant progress in past ages. There remains no new form of opposition or of danger which has not already been successfully encountered; no enemy to combat who has not been already vanquished; no power which has not already been overthrown (ε).

4. Because of the peculiar and encouraging appearances which are now everywhere beheld in the condition and circumstances of the Church. Awaking from her long and inglorious repose, she has thrown aside that lethargy by which she was restrained from asserting her ancient glories. She has heard and is responding to the voice of Him who summons her to extend her conquests, and to inherit the desolate heritages.—*R. S. M'All, LL.D.: Sermons*, pp. 422-472.

(α) See outlines on this clause, and on the description: "A man of sorrows," &c.

(β) What ecstasy were it to reflect that we had snatched a fellow-creature from the devouring flame or the tempestuous deep; that we had stayed the progress of contagion or pestilence in its march of silence and desolation; that we had unbarred the dungeon of the prisoner, or burst the fetter of the slave! How exalted, then, the joy with which the adorable Redeemer must behold the helpless ruin of mankind exchanged for happiness and safety!—*M'All.*

(γ) With what holy and elevated transport may the martyrs and confessors, the prophets and apostles, be supposed to look now upon the scene of their labours and the progress of their cause! How may we suppose them now to exult in the remembrance of their self-denying efforts and oppressive privations, their wants and trials and griefs, and, more than all, that terrible moment when they sealed their last testimony, and closed their career in blood! With what unspeakable felicity must those devoted missionaries, lately removed from us, behold, amidst the mansions of blessedness, the first-fruits of their labours—the poor wanderer of Africa or the wretched slave of Demerara—now mingling in the chorus of the redeemed! But who shall describe the interest taken in all that relates to the salvation of His people by their ascended and sympathising Lord? Here all the causes of interest and joy are united in the highest operation. The affection of the Saviour is infinite. The relation He bears to the saved is the closest and most indissoluble; and their rescue and happiness are the results only of His dying agonies and His ever-living intercession.—*M'All.*

(δ) Never, amongst all the diversity of sacrificial institutions in any country or in any age, has there appeared even a distant resemblance to many of the most essential features of this great Christian propitiation. Never has the guilt of sin been represented as forgiven, in consequence of a design mercifully originating in the Deity Himself, and that, too, in opposition to the provocation and obstinate rebellion of the miserable offender. Never has the part to be sustained by the worshipper been declared to be that only of the free and joyous reception of unpurchased favour and the simple reliance of a grateful heart. Never has the victim been represented as provided, not by man, but God, and that victim the object of His own unspeakable and infinite attachment. Never has that victim been represented as offering himself willingly to suffer, not on behalf of his friends, but of his enemies, and for the pardon of the very crime by which he died.

The manner in which it addresses itself to the heart is equally peculiar. Other systems effectuate their purpose the most fully when they can alarm and agitate and appal. It is this alone which lulls the breast into sacred tranquillity, and, banishing every fear, ravishes the soul with ceaseless adoration, and allures to the cheerful obedience of gratitude and love, and unites the tears of contrition with the ardour of thankfulness and the exultation of hope.—*M'All.*

(ε) No subtlety of philosophical scepticism can be harder to subdue than that which was opposed to the first proclamation of the Gospel by Porphyry, Celsus, and Julian, and the learned of Greece and Asia; nor any political

power more terrible than that which was exercised by Nero, Domitian, and Maximus; no barbarism more fierce than that of the Scythians, the Sarmatians, and the Gauls; no ignorance more gross, no darkness of the understanding more intense, than that of the Greenlander and the Esquimaux. But over these the Gospel has already triumphed; and what cause have we then to tremble for the future?—*M'All.*

The Travail and Satisfaction of the Redeemer's Soul.

liii. 11. *He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.*

Three distinct ideas presented:—

I. The travail of our Redeemer's soul.

The "travail" of the Redeemer signifies the sufferings He underwent. By "the travail of His soul" is meant that peculiar agony of grief by which His soul was affected in the course of His sufferings. The physical sufferings of some of "the noble army of martyrs" equalled, perhaps surpassed, those of their Lord. But the sorrows of His soul forced from Him His bloody sweat, and His cry, "My God," &c. These sorrows were wisely designated by the ancient fathers of the Church, "the unknown sufferings of the Son of God." But it is revealed that two of the ingredients in that cup of mental suffering were the burden of the sins of a guilty world, and the furious onslaught of Satan and his emissaries in the utmost violence and plenitude of their power. We must also take into view certain considerations of a peculiar nature which tend to heighten our conceptions of their character and extent:—

1. The soul of the Redeemer was *perfect in holiness.* In proportion to a man's purity of heart is the shock and revulsion of soul of which he is conscious, when he is compelled to witness the debasing and desolating effects of sin. Inconceivably painful must have been the travail of our Redeemer's soul when He was brought into the nearest relation to sin that is possible to a being perfectly pure, when surveying its horrors in the light of His own spotless holiness, when bearing the wrath of His heavenly Father on account of it.

2. The soul of the Redeemer was *full of light.* Confined to a small spot of the surface of the globe, and capable of interpreting only to a very small degree those revelations of the future which have been vouchsafed to us, our conception of the real extent of the tendencies and effects of sin is very limited. But to the mind of the Redeemer all the awful effects of sin throughout time and eternity lay bare, and the impression thereby produced must have been correspondingly deep and solemn. Moreover, when man suffers, his sufferings come on him by a gradual process, and he is sustained by the hope of deliverance at every stage of his journey. But to our Redeemer all the parts and constituents of His sufferings were by clear anticipation present at one and the same instant. What, then, must have been "the travail of His soul?"

3. The soul of the Redeemer was *full of love.* A philanthropist feels with tender acuteness for the distresses of his fellowmen. What, then, must have been the travail of the Redeemer's soul when, in the full flow of His ardent and unlimited benevolence, He surveyed the ruin of man's moral greatness, and died that He might restore him to his forfeited honour?

II. The results of our Saviour's sufferings as seen by Himself.

In the preceding part of the chapter, He is represented as suffering the most cruel and ignominious inflictions on account of sin. Here He is represented as beholding the results of His sufferings—in the deliverance of unnumbered millions of sinful men from the condemnation and misery of sin, and their exaltation to blessedness and glory in heaven. Those results began to appear in the entrance of Abel into heaven; and have been seen in every heart, every home, every country in which the work that Christ came into

the world to do has been accomplished. What glorious and exquisitely beautiful results!

III. THE SATISFACTION WHICH THE REDEEMER FEELS IN CONTEMPLATING THE RESULTS OF "THE TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL." A debased mind is satisfied with what is mean and degrading; a narrow mind will rest contented with what is little and trifling; but an enlarged and comprehensive mind will be pleased only with what is dignified and noble! What, then, can be that which can satisfy the soul of the Divine Redeemer? It is by us inconceivable. But some things we do see—

1. That the scheme of redemption affords *a bright display of the attributes of God.*

2. That through the sufferings and death of Christ *the great interests of holiness have been most effectually secured.* His people are delivered from the dominion as well as the condemnation of sin. On holiness the welfare and happiness of the universe depend.

3. That by His blood *countless myriads of the human race have been redeemed.* As He contemplates these things, we may say with reverent confidence, His mind, expanded with the noblest and purest benevolence, must become filled with delight and satisfaction indescribable.

CONCLUSION.—1. This great theme reminds us of the inestimable value of the human soul. Surely that must be inestimably precious the redemption of which, at such a cost, can satisfy the Son of God (P. D. 3204).

2. If the salvation of a soul gives delight to the mind of God, surely He will not reject any awakened sinner who comes to Him in faith (John vi. 37; Rev. xxii. 17; H. E. I. 928, 929).

3. The subject furnishes the most powerful motives to love and obey the Saviour. By so doing we co-operate in the accomplishment of His great design, and contribute to the satisfaction of His soul.

4. The subject furnishes most ample encouragement in the labours and trials of the Christian ministry. The enterprise in which we are engaged is the opposite of hopeless, for God has promised that by the results of it His Son shall be satisfied, and "He is faithful who hath promised!" Besides, in what can we find greater delight than in doing something to contribute to the satisfaction of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us?—*Robert Burns, D.D.: Protestant Preacher*, vol. iii. pp. 399–408.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

I. A FEW THOUGHTS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE MEANING OF THE TEXT.

1. *Mark the singularity and greatness which our text would seem to teach us to attach to Christ.* It implies a distinction between Christ and the Church. He is not a part of it; He does not rank with saved men. He, looking upon them, "shall see of the travail of His soul;" they, looking unto Him, shall behold the source of their spiritual existence. In such a case there must be an essential difference between the parties. To confound them together, as of the same nature, and possessing nothing else on either side, would seem like confounding the potter with the material substance he can fashion as he will, or the Creator of the world with the work of His hands. God is not a part of the creation; nor is Christ a part of the Church. This essential distinction, or at least the supremacy resulting from it, would seem to be indicated by the declaration that "*He* shall be satisfied;" as if to intimate that were He not, whatever else might be achieved, nothing comparatively would seem to be accomplished.

2. The passage also indicates *the peculiar work of Christ, and attaches pre eminent importance to that.* (1.) This remarkable expression would seem to imply that all the glory of the Church, all the salvation of sinners, the perfection of the faithful, whatever in the consequences of His undertaking connected either with God or man can be regarded as a source of satisfaction to Messiah, is to be attributed to the fact that "His soul was made an offering

for sin." The sufferings of Christ and the salvation of men are connected together as cause and effect. (2.) It suggests also an important truth in relation to the nature of those sufferings. "The travail of His *soul*" would seem to indicate that the *mind* of Messiah was more immediately the seat of His atoning agonies (α). (3.) Of those agonies the passage further depicts the intense and aggravated character—"the *travail* of His soul." The pangs of "a woman in travail" is a phrase sanctioned and employed again and again by the Divine Spirit, as an image combining in itself all that can be conceived of the extreme and the terrible in human suffering. And this image, among others, is here employed to depict the mental sensations of the Son of God when "the chastisement of our peace was upon Him," &c. "Travail" is the peculiar suffering connected with the natural birth of a human being; and as applied to Christ it intimates that in the throes and pangs of His soul, He endured what was necessary to give spiritual existence to the Church.

It was not what Christ was in His moral character, nor what He did as a prophet, "mighty in deed and in word," that constituted that peculiar work by which He became personally and alone the Saviour of men.

3. *The greatness of the results which are to flow from the Redeemer's sufferings.* Implied in the declaration, "He shall be *satisfied;*" the mind of Messiah shall be filled with joy when He witnesses the effect of His sufferings in the salvation of the redeemed. That the results productive in Him of this feeling must be surpassingly and inconceivably great appears from several considerations. (1.) Messiah is the Creator of the universe (John i. 3). All its vastness and magnificence was needed to satisfy Him as such. How much sublimer must those spiritual results necessarily be with which He is to be "satisfied!" The new creation may reasonably be expected to surpass as far the old and the earthly as the human intellect is superior to dead brute matter, or the love of God's heart must necessarily excel the power of His hand, or the redemption of the lost exceeds and surpasses the support of the living. (2.) The extent and intensity of His sufferings (β). For all those sufferings He is to be recompensed (John xvi. 21), but in an infinitely higher degree. (3.) Consider the period occupied, the care expended, and the anxiety sustained in carrying on the process, the result of which is to satisfy Messiah. In nature, that which is of slow growth is always distinguished by proportionate excellence. Among men, long-continued and arduous labour is expected to be followed by corresponding results, both in the effects produced and in the rewards enjoyed. But the work of redemption abounds over history of all time. Nay, previous to the birth of time, it occupied the thought and councils of the Eternal. In actual operation it stretches from the fall of man to the restitution of all things. The reward will be proportioned to the magnitude and costliness of the work performed.

4. *Those things with which we may suppose the Saviour will be "satisfied."* (1.) The inconceivable number of the saved (γ). (2.) The equally inconceivable perfection of their character. (3.) The love and adoration of the redeemed. (4.) The effect of the work of redemption on the moral universe, revealing God more fully to it, and helping to keep it loyal to Him.

II. HOW WE WHO UNDERSTAND AND BELIEVE THE MEANING OF THE TEXT OUGHT TO BE AFFECTED.

1. *We should be moved to humility.* The continued prevalence in the world of what grieves and offends Him ought to have disappeared long since, and would have done so, had the Church been faithful to her office and her Lord. In the unfaithfulness of the Church we have had our share.

2. *The declaration of our text should stimulate our faith and missionary activity.* "He *shall* see, &c." Christianity is yet to be acknowledged and professed by universal man (H. E. I. 979. 1166–

1169). But this end, however confidently expected, even faith expects not without the employment of appropriate instrumentality. Among the means employed, there must be the sending forth of the Bible and the preacher, the letter of the message and the loving messenger.

3. *The subject ought to lead us, individually and personally, seriously to examine whether we are contributing to the Saviour's "satisfaction," either by what we are, or what we are doing* (H. E. I. 4423–4428, 4446–4466).—*T. Binney, L.L.D.: Sermons*, second series, pp. 1–50.

(α) "The travail of His *soul*" carries us further than to what was physical; it teaches us to attach inferior importance to the bruising and the piercing of the flesh—to the animal pain (if I may so speak) which the Redeemer endured, and which, whatever was its extent, was probably surpassed in many of the martyrs. "The travail of His *soul*" would seem to explain that mysterious amazement which overtook and overwhelmed the Lord Jesus previous to His public rejection by the people, before the hand of man had touched Him, when alone with His disciples and in the attitude of prayer. If it be proper to use such an expression with respect to Him, with all reverence I would say that at that moment He seemed destitute or bereft of the high bearing, the calm serenity, the magnanimous heroism, the contempt of danger, pain, death, which have often illustrated the conduct of His followers, even women, under circumstances similar or worse—worse, if the external circumstances were all. Now, this is a fact in the history of Jesus eternally irreconcileable with the idea of His dying merely as a witness for truth, or an example to others; it can be accounted for, with honour to His character, only on the ground of His sustaining as sacrificial victim, and sustaining *in His soul*, sufferings exclusively and pre-eminently His own.—*Binney.*

(β) What the sufferings of Messiah really were in themselves, it is as impossible to say as it is to conceive of their magnitude and their depth. They could not be literally the agonies of the damned; literally *the* curse due to sin, or the direct results on a spiritual nature of the foul act of personal transgression. And yet if anything there be bearing any resemblance to them at all—which probably there is not—it must be found among the victims of retributive justice. The sufferings of Christ, whatever they were, in fact were those which resulted from the presentation of Himself as a real sacrifice, the sacrifice of a living, sensitive Being in an "offering made by fire unto the Lord." The fire, indeed, was spiritual, like the thing it touched; and from that very circumstance it was the more terrible. It was not that element that can become the servant of man, and minister to his wrath, and be made to seize upon and "destroy the body, and after that hath nothing more that it can do;" but it was fire which nothing but heaven could furnish, something which God alone could inflict and which a spiritual nature alone could feel. It descended upon the soul of the Redeemer, and (if I may so speak) consumed it, like the fire which descended upon the altar of the prophet, "which consumed the burnt-sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." Sufferings flowing from a source like this cannot but be felt to have been unparalleled and unspeakable; they necessarily transcend not only the power of language, but the power of thought.—*Binney.*

(γ) Messiah, it is said, is to "see His seed," "justify many," and "the pleasure of the Lord is to prosper in His hand." This work could not, I think, be said to "prosper" if the number of the lost should exceed that of the saved; nor if the number of the lost and saved were nearly balanced; nor if the success of Messiah in rescuing from death were to be but little superior to that of His adversary in seducing to destruction. The saved will, I imagine, as to numbers surpass the lost to a degree that shall destroy everything like parallel or proportion between them. They shall be brought from all lands, and from under every dispensation; they shall be "of all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues;" they shall be of every class, and colour, and condition; and they shall constitute "a number which no man can number," equalling or exceeding the sands of the sea, or "the stars of heaven," or "the grass of the field," or "the drops of dew from the womb of the morning."—*Binney.*

Christ's bodily travail was great. On this part of the Messiah's sufferings the prophet lays no particular emphasis, because, though most visible, it was not the main part of His atoning sufferings. He emphasizes the inward mental spiritual agony as that in which he chiefly bore our iniquities. Let us reverently note some of those things which we may conceive constituted for our Lord, "the travail of His soul"—first, during his life, and secondly, in connection with His death; though this distinction is not to be pressed, since the sufferings of the life and of the death overlap each other, and constitute together "the travail of His soul."

I. IN LIFE. We must not limit Christ's atoning mental sufferings to His actual endurance on the cross, or forget what He endured before the last scenes of His ministry on earth. The whole period of His public ministry was a "temptation," and to Him temptation was suffering, as He met and fought it. 1. *He endured "the contradiction of sinners against Himself."* 2. *The sight and contact of human sin and misery as they lay passive around Him must have deeply wounded His soul.* If Lot could vex his righteous soul in Sodom, what must Christ have endured as He saw all that was debased and repulsive in humanity with His holy eye (see p. 476), as He sighed over human pains and sorrows, and made them in sympathy His own (Matt. viii. 17; see p. 484). 3. *His foresight of the doom coming on God's chosen people caused Him pain* (Luke xix. 41–44). 4. *The shadow of the cross projecting itself over His life cast a burden on His spirit* as He anticipated the end of His ministry (Mark viii. 31, &c.).

II. IN CONNECTION WITH DEATH. The travail of soul during life culminated at death, assuming a distinctness and bitterness peculiarly great as that crisis arrived. All the past was intensified and concentrated, and additional elements of pain were experienced. Thus His friends forsook Him and fled. One denied Him. One betrayed Him. Did not this experience, to one who was so sympathetic and social Himself, and who then needed all the human sympathy and society which His friends could give Him, cause sorrow of soul of no ordinary kind? His enemies, too, the people He came to save, trampled His love under foot, insulted, maligned, cast Him out, and crucified Him, inflicting sorer wounds upon His generous heart and loving soul than on His body by their shameful treatment of Him. The lifelong vision and contact of sin came to a head in its most painful and repulsive form, and He would see more vividly and feel more acutely in His own maltreatment the depravity, not only of the nation, but of the race which He had come to save, and of which He was one. The fierce passions that raged against Him, His actual collision with the world's evil, His suffering of its concentrated hatred of good must have caused Him, the only sinless One of the race, unspeakable horror and anguish of soul. But there was also—

1. *The human and natural shrinking from death* as the dissolution of soul and body; in His case peculiarly painful because of the perfection of His human nature, the consciousness of His own sinlessness, the fulness of His indwelling power of life, the clear insight He had into the dread connection between sin and death, and that His death was by judicial murder. He was not a Stoic. He was not ignorant of what it involved, and had not the feeling that it was natural for Him to submit to the "common lot," or die a death of refined and wilful cruelty.

2. *Satanic temptation.* The prince of this world came back to find something in Him, and found nothing. But the search was painful, as the devil did his last and worst, since all temptation is suffering. It was the hour and power of darkness for our Lord when the seed of the serpent bruised the heel of the seed of the woman. The bruising of the heel might indicate only a slight injury in comparison with the wounding of the head, but who can tell what in itself it was to Jesus Christ; how manifold and searching were the assaults of Satan, and how they intensified the bitterness of Christ's sorrow of soul?

3. *His treatment as a sinner.* Christ realised sin in the, to Him, most painful form of bearing it and suffering for it. He was "made sin for us"—enduring for us, in some real but mysterious way, the wrath of God due to us for our sins. Every view of His death which ignores this wraps His whole suffering in inexplicable mystery, and provokes men to despair, not only of themselves, but even of God. What pain for the Holy One to be treated, not merely by man, but by God as a sinner, to feel in His soul

the anger of God, to be forsaken for a time by His Father! Who can fathom the depth of soul-sorrow in the cry, "My God," &c., as it came from the heart of the only-begotten and well-beloved Son?

LEARN—(1.) The costliness of His redemption. (2.) The evil and shamefulness of sin. (3.) The reality of our Lord's sympathy for all who are in the world as He was, and follow in His footsteps. (4.) The greatness of the suffering of the impenitent.—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. pp. 78–82.

Throughout the chapter the Messiah appears as a suffering individual. He is represented as bearing the punishment of sin, though not on His own account, but on behalf of others, for whom He appears as a substitute. The expression, "travail of His soul," is elliptical, and evidently means, that He shall see the *fruit* of the travail of His soul. The mighty and benevolent objects He had in view would certainly be accomplished, and would be fully satisfactory to Him.

I. SOME OF THOSE OBJECTS WHICH THE MESSIAH SHALL BEHOLD AS THE RESULT OF HIS SUFFERING.

1. *Obstructions removed out of the way of the sinner's salvation.* The apostasy and rebellion of man have subjected him to the curse of the divine law. No offer of mercy can be made to him, while that law, by which God rules all worlds, is trampled upon and dishonoured. The substitution of the innocent for the guilty, was the great moral expedient by which God determined to save His apostate creatures, and to preserve unsullied the honour of His government. The object of divine mercy was to save transgressors, but the government of God required that sin should be condemned in the flesh. The obedience of the Son of God has magnified the law, as law. God can now, as a moral governor, exercise mercy without doing violence to His character, or weakening the obligations of His law.

2. *His own people saved.* Every sinner that has been saved, from the beginning of the world, has been saved by virtue of the death of Christ (Heb ix. 22, x. 4). After His humiliation and death, He was to see the fruit of His sufferings (ver. 10). The death of Christ was to be followed by the rapid and extensive diffusion of the truth. Christianity widely spread in every direction. It took root in every soil—it visited every clime—and gained converts from every rank in society.

3. *The moral disorders of our nature rectified.* He came to destroy the works of the devil, and to establish an empire of righteousness, truth, and joy in the Holy Ghost. As the doctrines of the cross extend, the Saviour is "purifying to Himself a people zealous of good works." This process is going on in the world; the latter-day glory will consist in the wide and extended reign of holy principles. The great mass of human society will be pervaded by them. Instead of wrath, hatred, envyings, covetousness, and all unrighteousness, love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, temperance, will become the dominant principles of action.

II. THE SATISFACTION WITH WHICH THE SAVIOUR WILL BEHOLD THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS PURPOSES.

1. *The completion of any great undertaking* is accompanied with pleasure and satisfaction. To see a wise and mighty scheme of action working out the anticipated results, cannot fail to be gratifying to the projector.

2. *The consciousness of having accomplished a work of infinite beneficence.* One of the purest and highest pleasures we can enjoy on earth is the consciousness of having performed a disinterested act of benevolence. To impart happiness is pleasurable to all virtuous minds, and our enjoyment will be in proportion to the magnitude of the blessing bestowed. Jesus Christ gives eternal life—an infinite good, and His satisfaction will be proportionably large and enduring. In the Saviour's consciousness of having bestowed an infinite blessing, there is an element of happiness peculiarly His own. He

still retains the sympathies and affections of our nature in His glorified state. We are to awake in His likeness. There will, therefore, be a peculiarity in the satisfaction He enjoys, arising from a community of feeling with us. There will be an identity of feeling, a sympathy in happiness, which no one can feel who has not tasted of humanity.

IMPROVEMENT.—1. Let the subject teach us that we all have a deep interest in the travail of the Redeemer's soul. It has a gracious aspect to every one of us. This is the glad tidings of salvation, the gospel of the grace of God.

2. How great are our obligations to the Saviour!—*Samuel Summers: Sermons*, pp. 169–191.

Were there no other evidence of the true divinity of our Lord than that which may be gathered from a comparison of this chapter with the accounts of His life, sufferings, and death, as furnished by the four Evangelists, it ought to be abundantly sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind. While Scripture is most positive and frequent in its declaration on this great doctrine, there is no passage or word, rightly understood, which favours a contrary opinion. If a firm belief in the true divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ is necessary, a proper notion of His real humanity is not less so. The doctrine of atonement requires a distinct conviction of the true and proper humanity of our Lord. Deity cannot suffer, &c. We shall confine ourselves to the consideration of our Lord's sufferings of soul; because general attention is directed rather to His sufferings of body, and because the text speaks expressly of the "travail of His soul."

I. OUR LORD'S TRAVAIL OF SOUL. He had a travail of soul arising—1. *From an anxious desire to be engaged in His great work.* We know something of this feeling. How strong must it have been in the soul of Christ (Luke xii. 50). 2. *From the temptations of the devil.* These were sometimes presented through the unconscious agency of others. But His severest temptations were suggested by Satan in his own person in the wilderness. 3. *From sorrow at men's impenitence and hardness* (Mark vi. 6; Matt. xxiii. 37). 4. *From fear in the immediate anticipation of His agony* (Heb. v. 7; Matt. xxvi. 38, 39). 5. *From a sense of Divine desertion.* "He trod the wine-press alone." All His sufferings and travail of soul were as nothing compared with that sensation of utter loneliness and destitution which wrung from Him that exceeding great and bitter cry, "My God," &c.

II. WHAT WERE THE RESULTS OF ALL THIS TRAVAIL OF SOUL AND AGONY OF BODY? 1. *In reference to man.* The result to every one who receives Him is Justification. "By the knowledge of Him shall My righteous servant justify many," implies a living faith in the Saviour.

2. *In reference to our Lord Himself.* One word expresses them. "He shall . . . be *satisfied.*" Satisfied with what? (1.) With its effects upon individuals, leading them from the depths of sin to the heights of holiness. (2.) With its efficacy for all mankind. (3.) With the fulfilment of the Divine engagement to save every believing penitent. No poor guilty sinner coming in the way of God's appointment has been rejected. (4.) The salvation of sinners is Christ's satisfaction. He does not regret His mediatorial undertaking, His reproach, and suffering, and death. He knows what our salvation has cost Him, and is satisfied.

But He may see of the travail of His soul and *not* be satisfied. He is not satisfied when the backslider crucifies Him afresh and puts Him to an open shame. He is not satisfied when the open sinner "tramples Him under foot," &c. We have all, I trust, given some satisfaction to Christ; but which of us has done so fully? How many defects and imperfections have marred our *best* services!—*S. D. Waddy, D.D.: Sermons*, pp 43–61.

To Christian Workers.

I. Without sacred travail—in the sense of labour, sacrifice, patience—**there is never any profound and abiding satisfaction.** Nothing precious in the world can be obtained without sacrifice; and this is just as true in the kingdom of God (α). So it is with God. Creation and Providence may be the recreations of Omnipotence, but Redemption could be accomplished only by infinite cost (β). Let us not dream of doing anything effective for ourselves or others cheaply.

II. Wherever there is sacred travail there is always abiding satisfaction. This lesson is as true as the other. No Christian labour is ever lost; it may seem lost, but it is not. Even when Christ re-ascended to heaven, His incarnation, His life, His death seemed to have been thrown away. A mere handful of disciples seemed the only result of it all. But was Christ's travail lost? Every century that has since rolled away has been revealing how much was accomplished by it. His cross has been a tree of life in the midst of the garden bearing all manner of fruits—in that it has reconciled man to God; that it has reconciled man to man; that it reconciles us to our earthly lot; that it sweetens every other cross; that it reconciles us to our duty. So will it be with all who labour for Christ. Whatever travail of love or consecration you or I can put into our life and labour, none of it will be lost; but there will be a divine satisfaction infinitely ample, enduringly grand, compensating for it all (γ).

III. The salvation of man is the satisfaction of God. Let this thought cheer the soul oppressed by guilt: God will *delight* to save you. Let it cheer the Christian worker; surely it should animate us in going forth to any work, that God is on our side, and that He finds His satisfaction in saving men.

IV. The salvation of men will be on such a scale as to give complete and perfect satisfaction to our God. "Satisfaction" is a large word. It is easy to please a man, but hard to satisfy him; and, as some one has said, it is the same with God: He is easily pleased, but hard to satisfy. Yet He shall be "SATISFIED!"—*R. Glover: The Baptist*, Oct. 11, 1878.

(α) We all would like that the law of Christian, and, indeed, of other life and success, was very different from this, and just as in the world people would like to get wealth without paying the price of it in labour, and would like to gain influence without rendering service by which it alone is won, and would like to get the love of their fellow-men without the life of friendliness that attracts it, so in spiritual things we would like cheaply, easily, to gain the precious things on which we set our eyes—forgiveness without repentance, perfect sanctity without the gradual and laborious self-denial by which alone it can be reached; usefulness we would like to get in some cheap and easy way without any sweat of agony, and without any strain of sympathy. We would all like in this way to get various things that are good—forgiveness, usefulness, raptures, light, conviction, assurance, without any travail. Now I do not know any lesson that it is more requisite for the young to learn, and more requisite for older men to keep themselves from forgetting than this—that without travail there is no abiding satisfaction.—*Glover.*

(β) When He aims at the greater objects that engage His heart and tax His powers, when He would not make but save the world, when He would get back to Him the love of His suspicious and wandering children, when He would fill His house with guests, and when He would make these guests eternally worthy of His fellowship and capable of communion with Him, then not easily even for Him can that work be done; but between Him and this joy that He sets before Him there is the travail of Bethlehem, with its loneliness, of His lonely pilgrim path of misunderstanding, of the weakness of feeble hearts, and the bitterness of hateful foes. There is Gethsemane, there is Calvary. Without travail there is no satisfaction.—*Glover.*

(γ) There may be travail in other directions without any satisfaction. Travail for wealth often leaves a man in poverty; travail for the sake of honour leaves him still insignificant and unknown. Do not spend your labour for that which will not profit, but aspire to the grand reward, to the noble results of existence, and put forth the sacred travail which, exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, is rewarded and blessed of heaven.—*Glover.*

The Knowledge that Justifies.

liii. 11. *By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many.*

"Of whom speaketh the prophet this?" (Acts viii. 34). Only of One, in all earth's history, could these things be said. Is not His name "Wonderful"? Here we have—

I. The Father's righteous servant. "My righteous servant," says God, as if He had never had another. "Servant," is a name of subjection and obedience, yet also of honour, according to the rank of him whom he serves. As servant He is the doer of the Father's will; the Father's servant for us, and in this sense our servant (Luke xxii. 27; Matt. xx. 28). As servant He is the fulfiller of the Law; the obedient One in all things; not pleasing Himself, nor doing His own will. "My righteous Servant," says God, as delighting in Him; for never before had He got such service and such righteousness; Divine, yet human service; Divine, yet human righteousness. It is of this righteous Servant that the whole chapter speaks. Wondrous servant! Gracious service! What or where should we be without such a servant and such a service? All we need is ministered to us by Him freely, liberally, lovingly!

II. This righteous servant justifies. He is no common servant. He is the great Judge of all; the Justifier of the sinner; He who acquits and pardons the guilty. He acted as such on earth (John viii. 11; Matt. ix. 2, &c.); He acts as such in heaven. Our justification is in His hands; we go to Him to be justified. In one aspect it is the Father that justifies; in another, it is the Son. He "justifies many." All power is given Him—judicial, royal, priestly. We get acquittal and acceptance from His priestly-royal hands. "Let us then come boldly," &c. His justifying sentence reverses the law's condemning sentence. It is with the condemned that He deals; it is them that He pardons. There was justice in the condemnation: there is no less justice in the pardon. The Justifier is the Father's Servant; the Word made flesh; the Son of God, who came in the name of the Lord to save us. Grace and righteousness in all their fulness are to be found in Him.

III. This righteous servant justifies by His knowledge. The "knowledge" is the link between the "many" and justification. He justifies them by giving them the knowledge of Himself as the Justifier, and of His work as the justifying thing. Knowledge is not here used in the sense of wisdom or understanding. It means that which He teaches them to know. We are justified by knowing the "righteous servant." It is not by working, or praying, or suffering, but by knowing, that we enter on the state of acceptance (John xvii. 3). This is one of the simplest aspects in which the Gospel is presented to us. There is no mystery or darkness here. To know Jesus is to be justified! The justified man can say nothing in his own behalf; nothing good has he found in himself, in his works, feelings, character. The knowledge of "God's righteous servant" has brought him into the state of "no condemnation." Satisfied with that knowledge, though satisfied with nothing about himself, he can say with certainty and gladness, "Who is he that condemneth?"

IV. This righteous servant justifies by bearing the iniquity of those whom He justifies. He justifies as a judge; as a judge giving righteous judgment; righteous judgment in acquitting the unrighteous The ground on which He justifies is not mere grace, it is also righteousness. Not that sin is trivial; but that He has borne iniquity in the room of righteousness. God has given us a testimony to the work of His Son; and He has added the promise, that whosoever believes that testimony is

straightway justified We believe and are justified. We know that we are so because of the sure word of promise to him who receives the testimony. This is what is called "appropriation." It is the simple conclusion we draw from our believing the testimony. "He that believeth hath everlasting life."—*Horatius Bonar, D.D.: Light and Truth, Old Testament*, pp. 266–270.

The Work and the Reward of Christ.

liii. 12. *Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, &c.*

Both the work and the reward of the Saviour were included in the prophecies concerning Him.

I. His work.

1. *Its culminating act.* "He hath poured out His soul unto death." Not His incarnation, poverty, miracles, teaching, obedience. All these necessary. But the grand act was His death. 2. *Its humiliating circumstances.* "He was numbered with the transgressors." On the cross as a malefactor with malefactors. 3. *Its vicarious character.* "And He bore the sin of many." This conducts our thoughts farther than the outward spectacle, to the reason of it. 4. *Its mediatorial power.* "He made intercession for the transgressors" (Luke xxiii. 34; Heb. vii. 25; 1 John ii. 1, 2).

II. His reward.

"Therefore will I divide Him," &c. The allusion is to the conqueror receiving as his reward a portion of the spoils taken in war. Christ's triumphal entry into heaven and seat upon the throne. His acquisition of the souls rescued from the power of the enemy. Illustrate by the progress of the Church from small beginnings to the present time. Also its further progress as indicated in prophecy as yet unfulfilled. This includes a multitude which no man can number; and all the intellect, wealth, holy character, talent, power of usefulness of each.

Conclusion.—1. These glorious results will be secured by human agency. 2. The work is committed to the Church of Christ, every member of which is responsible for his proper portion of it. 3. The strongest motives to engagement in this enterprise exist. They are the united obligations of love and loyalty.—*J. Rawlinson.*

Be careful not to mistake the pleasure with which you listen to a subject like this for real religion and acceptable devotion. Many weep over Christ's sufferings who never weep over their sins, &c. The true feeling with which we should contemplate His work.

I. Christ as a sufferer. This chapter forms rather a history of His passion, than a prophecy. It appears to be a part of God's procedure that the most important blessings should arise out of suffering. Christ has consecrated and ennobled the path of suffering.

1. *Christ's sufferings were penal.* Ours are salutary. We have many alleviations under them, and have cheerful hopes of benefit by them, but Christ was unsustained by the prospect of any moral benefit to Himself.

2. *Christ's sufferings were vicarious.*

3. *Christ's sufferings were chiefly intellectual.*

Some of the advantages arising from the fact that our Saviour was a sufferer.—(1.) It reconciles us to the endurance of trial. (2.) It secures to us support and sympathy under the pressure of our various trials. (3.) It leads us to anticipate a final conquest over trial. Glory preceded by humiliation, &c.

II. Christ as a conqueror (Col. ii. 15; Phil. ii. 9). Innumerable multitudes shall enjoy the benefits of His death. He is still conquering. The final triumph is certain.

III. Christ as an intercessor.

In Christ we have a complete and all-sufficient Saviour.—*Samuel Thodey.*

LESSONS AT THE CROSS.

(For Good Friday, or Sacramental Service.)

Isa. liii. 12. *He hath poured out His soul unto death.*

Of all wonderful deaths, that of the Son of God is the most wonderful. Let us take our stand at the cross, and gather up some of the lessons taught by His death—

I. THE IMMEASURABLE DEPTH OF MAN'S MISERY.

He had sunk so low that he could sink no lower, except he sank into hell. He might justly have been left to perish, and must have perished but for the interposition of the Son of God, who assumed the nature that had sinned, &c., and "poured out His soul unto death" on the accursed tree. He alone could rescue man from Satan's grasp, &c. (Isa. xlix. 24–26).

II. THE INFINITE ENORMITY OF SIN.

It is evident that to a God of perfect purity sin must be infinitely hateful. Call to mind the destruction of fallen angels, the expulsion from Eden of the parents of our race, &c. The Apostle Paul maintains that sin subjects the sinner to temporal, spiritual, and eternal death, by a law perfectly holy, just, and good, and is consequently set forth in its true colours as "exceeding sinful"—out of measure, beyond all expression or conception sinful (Rom. vii. 13). But the crowning evidence is seen in the cross of Christ: not so much in the fact that impenitent sinners are damned by it, as that the immaculate Son of God died for it. What must be its enormity when God's mercy could not consistently pardon it till His own Son had undergone its punishment—a person of infinite purity, dignity, and worth, &c.? Cease to regard sin as a trifle, &c. Put yourself in the line of God's view of it. A right estimate of sin is a vital point in the process of personal salvation. Repent, and believe on Christ, or you must perish eternally, for "there is no other sacrifice for sin." If God spared not His own sinless Son, when He bore the sins of the guilty, much less will He spare impenitent sinners when they bear their own sins.

III. THE ALL-SUFFICIENT ATONEMENT FOR SIN, AND THE ONLY FOUNDATION OF HOPE FOR SINNERS.

Christ did not die as a martyr, or as a spotless example of virtue, &c. These were important ends secured by His death, but they were not the *direct* and *supreme* purpose of His death, which was, according to the uniform teaching of the sacred word, "for our sins," &c.—a substitutionary sacrifice, &c. Though God is a being of infinite love, He cannot pardon sin apart from an adequate atonement. All ideas of Divine mercy separate from the great atoning scheme are erroneous, valueless, dangerous. "God was in Christ," &c. God has always dealt with humanity "in Christ," whether they have known it or not. The dealings of an absolute God with a sinner—a God out of Christ, what would that be? What is the appropriate retort of offended Omnipotence? Annihilation. The history of mankind is a history of redemption. All the characteristics and conditions of an adequate atonement met in the Christ. That the Father has accepted His atoning work as all-sufficient is evident by His raising Him from the dead, and exalting Him, &c. (Acts v. 31, and others). And, that His death is now available as an atonement for sin, is manifest from the fact, that He is set before us in the Gospel, by the supreme authority of the Father, as the only object of faith and ground of acceptance (Rom. iii. 25, 26; Gal. ii. 21, and others). Have you "received the atonement?" If not, you have not found the ground on which you can venture without fear into the presence of the Holy One, &c.

IV. THE SUPREME REVELATION OF DIVINE LOVE.

All other manifestations are but faint compared with the love exhibited in our redemption. Either Christ must assume our nature, &c., or the race must perish. Will God's love to a world of sinners induce Him to give His Son? The everlasting interests of humanity were suspended upon that question (Rom. viii. 32; John iii. 16, and others). He might have formed a more glorious world, &c., but He could not manifest His love in a higher degree than He has done. What more convincing proof can you want that God loves you? Can you continue to grieve such love? Yield to His love's all-conquering power.

Let us, then, often visit the cross to learn the depth of our misery, &c.; the one great theme of all true Christian preaching, and the supreme object of Christian glorying (Gal. vi. 14, 15; P. D. 595).—*A. Tucker.*

THE FRIEND OF SINNERS.

liii. 12. *He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

A vague notion is abroad in the world that the benefit of Christ's passion is intended only for good people. How inconsistent is such a supposition with the whole teaching of Scripture. Consider the *plan* itself. It was a plan of salvation and of necessity, it was intended to bless sinners. The plan was based in grace, but how "*grace*," unless it was meant for persons who deserve nothing? Moreover, think of the *work* itself. The work of Christ was to bring in a perfect righteousness. For whom? For those who had a righteousness? That were a superfluity. And then look at *God's end* in the whole work. It was to glorify Himself; but how could God be glorified by washing spotless souls, and by bringing to everlasting glory by grace those who could have entered heaven by merit?

Our text, in its threefold character, shows the intimate connection which exists between Jesus and sinners, for in none of its sentences is there meaning unless there be a sinner, and unless Christ has come into connection with him. It is this one point I want to work out.

I. CHRIST IS ENROLLED AMONG SINNERS.

In what sense are we to understand this? He was numbered with them—

1. *In the census of the Roman Empire.* There went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that all the world should be taxed, and the espoused wife of Joseph, being great with child, must travel to Bethlehem that Christ may be born there, and that He may be numbered with the transgressing people, who, for their sins, were subject to the Roman yoke.

2. *In the scroll of fame.* Ask public rumour "What is the character of Jesus of Nazareth?" and it cannot find a word in its vocabulary foul enough for Him. "This ——" they sometimes said; and our translators have inserted the word "fellow," because in the original there is an ellipsis, the Evangelists, I suppose, hardly liking to write the word which had been cast upon Christ. Fame, with her lying tongue, said He was a drunken man and a wine-bibber, &c.

3. *In the courts of law.* The ecclesiastical court of Judaism, the Sanhedrim, said of Him, "Thou blasphemest;" and they smote Him on the cheek. Written down among the offenders against the dignity of God and against the security of the Jewish Church, you find the name of Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified. The civil courts also asserted the same. Pilate may wash his hands in water, and say, "I find no fault in Him," but still, driven by the infernal clam-

ours of an angry people, he is compelled to write, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews;" and he gives Him up to die as a malefactor who has rebelled against the sovereign law of the land. Herod, too, the Jewish tetrarch, confirms the sentence, and so, with two pens at once, Jesus Christ is written down by the civil leaders among transgressors.

4. *By the whole Jewish people.* Barabbas is put in competition with Christ, and they say, "Not this man, but Barabbas." His being numbered with transgressors is no fiction. Lo, He bears the transgressor's scourging! He bears the felon's cross. All earth holds up its hands for His death; it is carried unanimously. Of *all* men is He accounted to be the offscouring of all things, and is put to grief.

5. God, the Eternal Judge, shows that He too considers Him to be in the roll of transgressors, for He veils His face till Jesus shrieks in agony so unutterable, that the words cannot express the meaning of the Redeemer's soul, "My God," &c.! The only answer from heaven being, "I must forsake transgressors; thou art numbered with them, and therefore I must forsake thee." He dies without a protest on the part of earth, or heaven, or hell; He that was numbered with the transgressors, having worn the transgressor's crown of thorns, lies in the trangressor's grave.

Pause here a moment, and think this matter over. It is a strange and wonderful thing, and ought not to be passed by in silence. Why, think you, was Christ numbered with transgressors? (1.) Because *He could the better become their advocate.* I believe, in legal phraseology, in civil cases, the advocate considers himself to be part and partner with the person for whom he pleads. You hear the counsellor continually using the word "we;" he is considered by the judge to represent the person for whom he is an advocate. Now, Christ, when the sinner is brought to the bar, appears there Himself. What is the accusation? He stands to answer it; He points to His side, His hands, His feet, and challenges Justice to bring anything against the sinners whom He represents; He pleads His blood, and pleads so triumphantly, being numbered with them and having a part with them, that the judge proclaims, "Let them go their way; deliver them from going down into the pit, for He at their head hath found a ransom."

(2.) *That He might plead with them.* Suppose a number of prisoners confined in one of our old jails, and there is a person desirous to do them good, imagine that he cannot be admitted unless his name is put down in the calendar. Well, out of his abundant love to these prisoners he consents to it, and when he enters to talk with them, they perhaps think that he will come in with cold dignity; but he says, "Now, let me say to you first of all that I am one of yourselves." "Well," they say, "but have you done aught that is wrong?" "I will not answer you that," saith he; "but if you will just refer to the calendar you will find my name there; I am written down there among you as a criminal." Oh, how they open their hearts now! They opened their eyes with wonder first, but now they open their hearts, and they say, "Art thou become like one of us? Then we will talk with thee." And he begins to plead with them. Sinner, dost thou see this? Christ puts Himself as near on a level with thee as He can. He cannot be sinful as thou art, but He so puts His name down in the list that when the roll is called His name is called over with thine. Oh, how near doth He come to thee in thy ruined state!

(3.) *That sinners may feel their hearts drawn to Him.* There is a tendency in awakened sinners to be afraid of Christ; but who will be afraid of a man that is numbered with us? Surely now we may come boldly to Him, and confess our guilt. He that is numbered with us cannot condemn us.

(4.) *That we might be written in the red roll of the saints.* He was holy, and written among the holy; we were guilty, and numbered among the guilty; He transfers His name from

yonder list to this black indictment, and ours are taken from the indictment, foul and filthy, and written in the roll which is fair and glorious, for there is a transfer made between Christ and His people. All that we have goes to Christ; and all that Christ has comes to us.

II. CHRIST BARE THE SINS OF MANY.

1. Here it is as clear as noon-day, that Christ dealt with *sinners*. Do not say Christ died for those who have done no wrong. That is not the description given. It is clear to every one that chooses to look, that Christ could not bear the sins of those who had no sins, but could only bear the sins of men who were sinful and guilty. Their sins were really, not in a legal fiction, but really transferred from them to Him. You see, a man cannot bear a thing which is not on his back; it is impossible that he can bear it unless it is actually there. The word "bear" implies weight, and weight is the sure indicator of reality. Christ did bear sin in its fulness, vileness, and condemnation upon His own shoulders. Comprehend this, then, and you have the marrow of the subject.

2. Then notice, that as He did bear them, so other texts tell us that *He did bear them away* (John. i. 29). Sin being on His head, the scapegoat took it away. Where? Into the wilderness of forgetfulness. If it be sought for it shall not be found; the Everlasting God seeth it no more, it hath ceased to be, for He hath finished iniquity and made an end of sin; and when there is an end of it what more can be said?

3. *There is now no sin abiding upon those for whom Jesus died.* "And who are they?" you say. Why all those who trust Him. Are you a sinner? Yes or no. If you say "No," then I have nothing to say to you; Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. If you are a sinner, to you is the word of this salvation sent. "But I have been a thief!" I suppose a thief is a sinner? "But I have been a drunkard!" &c. &c. You come in under the list of sinners, and I say that such Christ contemplated, and the two sentences we have already considered prove this to a demonstration. He contemplated such as you are when He came to save, for "He was numbered with transgressors," and He "bare"—not the virtues, not the merits, not the good works of many, but "the sin of many." So, if you have any sin, here is Christ the sin-bearer; and if you are a sinner, here is Christ numbered with you.

III. JESUS INTERCEDES FOR SINNERS.

He prays for His saints, but remember that by nature they are transgressors, and nothing more.

1. There is a transgressor here this morning. He has been hearing the Gospel for many years, &c. I hear a voice saying—"Lo, these three years I come seeking fruit," &c. The woodman feels his axe; it is sharp and keen. "Now," says he, "I will lay to at this barren tree, and cut it down." But hark! There is One that maketh intercession for transgressors, hear Him, "Spare it yet a little while, till I dig about it and dung it," &c. Bless God that Christ pleads for you in that way.

2. But that done, He *pleads for their forgiveness.* "Father, forgive them," &c. It is this that breaks a man's heart; to think that Christ should have been loving me, with the whole force of His soul, while I was despising Him, and would have nothing to do with Him.

3. He next prays *that those for whom He intercedes may be saved, and may have a new life given them.* Every soul that is quickened by the Holy Spirit is so quickened as the result of His intercession for transgressors His prayer brings down the life, and dead sinners live. When they live He does not cease to pray for them, for by His intercession *they are preserved.* And more, *our coming to glory* is the result of the pleading of Christ for transgressors (John. xvii. 24).—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 458.

THE ASTONISHING INCREASE OF THE CHURCH.

(Missionary Sermon).

liv. 1–3. *Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear, &c.*

Vast accessions to the Church are here predicted. Consider—

I. The comparative sterility of the Jewish Church.

The union between God and His people is often compared to that between husband and wife (ch. 5; lxii. 5; Rev. xxi. 2–9; xxii. 17). The Church is here represented without inherent strength, apparently forsaken by God her head and husband, and therefore destitute of spiritual children (Gal. iv. 22). Comparatively few real believers—children of God and the Church—had been raised up within the narrow limits of the nation. And when the Messiah came, formalism, scepticism, and open impiety had become almost universal, which caused the small remnant of the faithful to mourn for Zion. But better times would be introduced by the advent of Christ, and the accomplishment of His redemptive work. St. Paul contrasts the universal Church of the New Testament, with the Church of the Old Testament legal dispensation, quoting this very passage (Gal. iv. 27; Eph. iii. 5–8).

II. The surprising increase of the Christian Church.

1. *Increase surpassing all experience, hope, faith.* The Jews, with comparatively few exceptions, "despised and rejected" the Saviour, and were cast off, but numerous children were born into the Church. The Gentile converts were adopted into her family, and those nations which had been wholly destitute of Church privileges—"strangers to the covenants of promise"—produced a far larger increase of true believers than the nation of Israel, which had been married to the Lord by their national covenant and distinguished advantages. Pentecost and the Acts of the Apostles—the first missionary record of the Church. How wonderful are these records of evangelistic triumph. Modern Christian missions not a failure, as some have the audacity to say. Their success far exceeds the most sanguine expectations of their founders. There are more conversions in heathen countries in the present day, in proportion to the number of preachers, than there are at home. "What hath God wrought!"

2. *The full accomplishment of this prediction is yet future.* The Church is as yet upon the threshold of missionary triumphs, and with but few exceptions is still doing preliminary work. All that has been done is only like a few stepping-stones towards the citadel that remains to be taken. But the accomplishment of the prediction is *certain*, because it is the revealed purpose of God. All difficulties shall be surmounted (Gal. iii. 29, and others). The Gospel shall spread with surprising rapidity—"shall break forth," as the breaking forth of waters, "on the right and on the left"—on every side, and into every land, until the now destitute world is replenished with the adopted and rejoicing children of God (ver. 3; xlix. 19, 20).

3. *With such a prospect, necessary preparations must be made* (ver. 2; xlix. 19, 20, &c.). The boundaries of the Church must be greatly enlarged to accommodate the vast accessions, nor need she fear making too large preparations (ver. 3; Zech. viii. 20–23; Mal. i. 9–11) (α).

III. The exultant joy at the astonishing increase. Common to Isaiah to interpose a song of praise on the announcement of any great and glorious truth (ch. xii. 5, 6; xlii. 10, 11; xliv. 23; xlix. 13). The Church is here called on to break out into loud and glad exclamations at the remarkable accession.

1. The joy of *individual* believers.

Nothing so adapted to gladden the heart as the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. For every subject of saving grace is not only blessed in himself, but he is made a blessing to others, and thus God's glory and the world's happiness are promoted.

2. The joy of the *family*. Nothing conduces so much to make our homes and households glad as the salvation of the family circle. It heals their strifes, soothes their sorrows, &c.

3. The joy of the *collective Church*. Nothing so adapted to make a people happy (Acts viii. 8; xv. 3). The object of Christ's mission, and the Church's labours and prayers, are realised, &c.

CONCLUSION.—1. The gradual development of God's purposes may well rebuke our impatience as to missionary success. We are most imperfect judges of what constitutes success. 2. Our own position and duty. Be incited to activity in the Redeemer's cause—seek in order to save the lost, &c. Let your gifts cease to be patronage, and become sacrifice, &c. 3. Are you children of God, born from above, &c? Accept Christ as your Saviour, and yield yourselves to His blessed service, &c. (Ps. lxxvii. 1, 2).—*A. Tucker.*

(a) This text has an interesting history as the subject of Carey's memorable sermon, the preaching of which, at Nottingham, in June 1792, may be affirmed, without extravagance, to have marked an epoch in the history of modern missions. After observing that the Church was, in these words, compared to some poor, desolate widow who lived alone in a small tent, that she who thus lived in a manner forlorn and childless, was told to expect such an increase in her family as would require a much larger dwelling, and this because her Maker was her husband whose name was not only the Lord of Hosts and the Holy one of Israel, but the God of the whole earth, he proceeded to bring out the spirit of the passage in two memorable exhortations—1. Expect great things from God. 2. Attempt great things for God. In private conference with his brethren immediately afterwards, Carey formally laid himself on the missionary altar, saying to Pearce and Fuller in those immortal words, 'I will go down into the pit, if you will hold the ropes;' and so was formed the Baptist Missionary Society, and a mightier impulse given to missionary zeal all over the world.—*W. Guthrie, M.A.*

THE AGGRESSIVE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

liv. 2, 3. *Enlarge the place of thy tent, &c.*

It is pre-eminently by aggressive movements that the Church is to prosper—to maintain her spiritual life and cause religion to flourish at home, and extend its triumphs abroad. The truth of this doctrine is suggested by—

I. THE FIRST IMPULSES OF THE RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE, THE SPIRIT OF LOVE IN EVERY CHRISTIAN'S BOSOM. This is strikingly exhibited in young converts. It is illustrated with great beauty in the conduct of Christ's earliest disciples. True religion is the spirit of Christ. Its language is, "something must be done," &c. It conceives plans, it demands efforts, for the world's conversion. Every real Christian that lives in the spirit of religion may consult his own consciousness on this subject. In his most favoured hours and nearest approaches to God, he will find his impulses to religious effort strongest.

II. THE FACT THAT TRUTH IS THE GRAND INSTRUMENT WHICH GOD EMPLOYS TO OVERTHROW THE KINGDOM OF SATAN, AND ADVANCE AND ESTABLISH THE KINGDOM OF HIS SON. The Word of God must not only be translated into all the languages of the earth, but it must be carried to every man's door; nay, its great truths must be pressed home upon every man's conscience. What a mighty work here opens for Christians of every name!

III. THE VERY ATTITUDE OF A FALLEN WORLD TOWARD GOD. It is one of hostility to His character and opposition to His truth (John iii. 19, 20). The world will not come to the

Church and crave instruction at her lips. As her Saviour sought her, so He requires her to seek sinners. She must make external and aggressive movements—must not study so much her own comfort as her enlargement. And this general rule of duty for the Church as a body applies to each member of the Church individually. So Christ teaches.

IV. THE WHOLE CURRENT OF SCRIPTURE PRECEPT AND REPRESENTATION. The Bible never instructs the Church that she is to conquer the world by her passive virtues, nor by any means which aim chiefly at conservation rather than aggression (Matt. xxviii. 18, 19, and others).

V. THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE GOSPEL. When has any signal advance been made in the work of human salvation, except by a movement similar to that described in the text? Christ's great redeeming enterprise—what was it but one of aggression? His was a missionary career: "He went about doing good." The Mosaic institution was peculiar. It was conservative rather than aggressive. Still, it was true *then* as now, that religion made no decided progress, even in Israel, except as the servants of the Lord made specific movements for this purpose. If this aspect of things strikes us in the Old Testament dispensation, how much more in that of the New? Mark how faithfully the first preachers of the Gospel carried out their Divine commission. Turn to a still later page in the history of the Church. How was it at the Reformation? When Whitfield and Wesley appeared? Just in proportion as any Church, in the spirit of Christ, attempts spiritual aggression, in the same proportion its interests are smiled upon and prospered.

REMARKS:—1. *We see why the Church is organised.* Pre-eminently, with a view to united and powerful external action. 2. *The grand object of all preaching.* The conversion of sinners. 3. This subject *throws light upon the providences of God towards the Church.* Now, as in former days, He allows heresies, persecutions, schisms, and various forms of affliction, from time to time, to invade the Church, thereby quickening our love for Christ and for souls.—*J. H. Linsley, D.D.: The Preacher's Treasury*, part iii., p. 55, &c.

CHEER FOR THE CHURCH.

liv. 4, 5. *Fear not . . . for thy Maker is thine husband, &c.*

I. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO BE DERIVED FROM THE POWER AND GRACE OF THE GREAT HEAD OF THE CHURCH. Here is the happy union of opposite attributes—the union of Majesty and Mercy, of the utmost grandeur and the utmost tenderness, &c. Here are certain relations specified, "thy Maker," &c., and the infinite resources specified by which those relations are sustained: "The Lord of Hosts," &c.

1. *Thy Maker*—therefore trust Him. God's power as a Creator is adequate to all the exigencies in which His people can be placed (ch. li. 12, 13; xl. 27–29; Job x. 9; xxxv. 10). 2. *Thy husband*—therefore trust Him. A title which combines all the charities of all other relationships (Eph. v. 25–27). A relation that cannot be broken—all others may (ch. l. 1; Hos. ii. 17, 20). 3. *Thy Redeemer*—therefore trust Him (Job. xix. 25; Gal. iv. 4, 5). Christ became a member of the human family, and stood forth as our near kinsman, our *Goël*, to whom the right of inheritance belonged. He did not refuse the office. Whom God redeems He exalts, and restores to all the privileges and immunities of which sin had deprived us. God's salvation is every way infinite; the extinction of an infinite evil, the bestowment of an infinite good, &c. 4. *The Holy One of Israel*—therefore trust Him. Every provision is made under the Gospel to uphold the obligations of the law, and to guard the legislative administration

of the Blessed and only Potentate. The redeemed family is under most binding obligations to obedience, love, &c. 5. *The Lord of Hosts, the God of the whole earth*—therefore trust Him. Infinite greatness is here combined with infinite goodness; the supremacy of dominion with the divinity of kindness, &c.

II. THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS.

1. *As a dissuasive from fear.* If the frequency of this exhortation supposes there is much to fear in the estimation of nature, it also supposes that there is more than enough to raise us above fear in the estimation of Grace. Comfort to every real Christian is richly furnished from the mighty power of God. Goodness is sufficient to make a promise, but Power is necessary to perform a promise. In God there is no limit to His willingness, &c. Trust this power in the performance of duty, in the resistance of temptations, in the endurance of trial, &c.

2. *As a persuasive to hope.* 3. *As an incentive to exertion.* 4. *As a plea to be constantly urged in prayer.—Samuel Thodey.*

GOD THE HUSBAND OF THE CHURCH.

liv. 5. *Thy Maker is thine husband.*

In exhibiting His wonderful grace to man, God stoops and assumes the most endearing relationship to him. How surprising that the Monarch of the skies should condescend to represent Himself the "husband" of His people. Yet He did so to wayward, rebellious Israel, and He does so to all who constitute His Church or people now. Each believer may consider the text as addressed to him.

I. THE UNION SPECIFIED. When rightly formed it is—1. *Grounded in love*, which is immeasurable—surpassing all created understanding.

2. *Most intimate and endearing.* There is a community of interests, and the connexion is one of the most close that can be formed. The apostle refers to this in several passages.

3. *Most abiding.* Believers yield themselves to be His for ever. God engages to be their present salvation, and everlasting portion and reward.

4. *Entirely mutual.* Personal interest is lost, and the mutual interests of both is the professed end of this union. The husband careth for the things of his wife, and the wife for the things of her husband. Thus God manifests His sympathy, love, and care, for His Church. And the Church professes in all things to show forth the glory of God. She engages to hallow His name, to revere His laws, to maintain His ordinances, and to show forth everywhere His praises, by devout and fervent thanksgiving to His name.

II. THE FORMATION OF THIS UNION.

1. *It originated in God's amazing love.* He purposed man's restoration to Himself. He determined to raise him to dignity and bliss, and this through the conjugal union with Himself.

2. *It was rendered possible by the work of Jesus Christ* (2 Cor. v. 19).

3. *To this union God invites sinners in His blessed Gospel* (Matt. xxii. 1–13). The great end of the Gospel is to bring men to a state of gracious and saving union with God.

4. *This union is consummated on the day when the believer yields himself to God.*

III. THE ADVANTAGES OF THIS UNION TO BELIEVERS.

1. *It is their exaltation.* This is rank and elevation above that of angels. Dignity which human language cannot express. 2. *It is their unspeakable riches.* The blessed God, in all His attributes and glories, is their portion, and present and eternal reward. "All are yours," &c. "Heirs of God." 3. *It is their present blessedness.* Brings comfort, peace, &c. 4. *It will be their everlasting salvation.* The very essence of that glory and happiness which the redeemed will enjoy for ever. This will annihilate all sources of evil.

APPLICATION.—1. *From this union*

various duties and obligations arise. Love, reverence, subjection, obedience, fidelity, confidence, and dependence. Zeal for His glory; jealousy for His honour; activity in His service; and entire devotedness to His cause.

2. *Urge upon sinners immediate self-dedication to God.* Every possible reason and motive should induce them so to do. This is the basis of all good.—*J. Burns, LL.D.: Sketches on Types, &c.*, pp. 122–126.

Both Testaments abound with striking metaphors, which exemplify the dear and intimate union which subsists between Christ and those who compose His Church. He calls them friends, children, brethren, &c. But no metaphor shows the tender and peculiar regard which Christ has to His Church, equal to this. How gracious the condescension, how endearing the appellation!

I. THE GLORIOUS DIGNITY OF THE BRIDEGROOM. He is—1. Thy Maker. 2. The Lord of Hosts. And who are these "hosts?" (Ps. cxlviii.) 3. Thy Redeemer. He assumed flesh in order that He might be your near kinsman, that in that nature He might have a right to redeem you. But how did He redeem? "He gave Himself." 4. The Holy One of Israel. 5. The God of the whole earth.

II. THE NATURE OF THIS UNION. 1. It is a union which springs entirely from grace. What else can it be on His part? What can charm Him, to unite Himself to thee?

2. It is a union accomplished by Almighty power. One would suppose that it were enough for the Lord of all to present Himself to the heart, for that heart immediately to open. Yet, strange to say, the moment these propositions are made, the human heart is barred against all enjoyments of the kind: it will not receive this heavenly lover. But in some favoured happy day He passes by, and the time is a time of love: He speaks, and the heart opens. 3. It is a spiritual union (Eph. v. 32; 1 Cor. vi. 17). 4. A very blessed union. Think of—(1.) The Dignity of those who are united to Him. Their name; their inheritance; their prospects. To be united with Christ for ever, in holiness, &c. (2.) Their present privileges, communion, support, protection, &c.

III. THE TERMS OF THE UNION. 1. A total divorce from all other lords. If you are wedded to sin, or to the world, or to the law, until you are divorced there is no union with Christ. Are you ready to break your allegiance to the world and sin? If so, then, on these terms you may come to Christ.

2. The mutual consent of both parties. Christ is willing. His invitations, His appeals, His voluntary death on your behalf are proofs. Sinner, are you willing?

CONCLUSION.—Congratulate such as are already united to Him. What a blessed people are you!—*J. Sherman: The Pulpit*, vol. i. pp. 465–474.

GOD'S DESIGNATION OF HIMSELF.

liv. 5. *The Holy One of Israel thy Redeemer* (R.V.).

This subject requires to be approached with the utmost reverence, and with a deep consciousness of the imperfection of our powers.

I. THE HOLINESS OF GOD. The Bible is full of declarations of His holiness.

1. The *nature* of Divine holiness. (1.) It is underived. (2.) It is absolutely perfect. He is incapable of impurity (Hab. i. 13). If we could conceive of God in any other character than this, we should revolt at the very idea of His existence and character, and our minds would be in perpetual anxiety and apprehension respecting His dealings toward us. But He always does right, and is always opposed to wrong. He is perfectly just and true—these are the

two great branches of this attribute (Deut. xxxii. 4). (3.) It is the glory of His nature (Ex. xv. 11; 2 Chron. xx. 21; 2 Kings xix. 22; Isa. iv. 4; Eph. iv. 18). He represents Himself more frequently in this character than in any other. (4.) It is the basis of His blessedness.

2. The *demonstration* of the Divine holiness. It appears—(1.) In creating man holy (Eccles. vii. 29; Col. iii. 10). (2.) In the law by which He governs humanity (Rom. vii. 12). (3.) In the infliction of punishment upon man when he sinned. (4.) In the restoration of man (2 Cor. iii. 18; Heb. vii. 26). The economy of grace is devised that polluted man may be restored to holiness. The cross of Christ is the highest possible expression of God's love of holiness. Our justification is not by the imperfect works of creatures, but by an exact and infinite righteousness (Rom. iii. 25, 26). See p. 295.

What a foundation for the trust and confidence of His people! How great is the sin of unbelief and pride. How earnestly we should long to be ever growing in likeness to Him, for His holiness is the reason and the standard of ours (1 Pet. i. 16). How terrible is God's infinite holiness to the ungodly!" "Who can stand before this Holy Lord God?"

II. THE UNITY OF GOD. Contrary to the many gods of the heathen. Polytheism has been far more common than Atheism. How deplorable is the blindness of the heathen, who, instead of the one true God, worship innumerable deities. Some of the heathens had better notions—Epictetus, Plato, &c.

1. The *nature* of the Divine unity. (1.) It is simple or uncompounded. He has no parts—His perfect nature admits of no composition. (2.) It is singular and unshared unity. He is not one of a genus or kind. He admits of no rival—no partner of His peculiar nature: it is an absolutely exclusive unity.

2. The *scriptural proof* of the Divine unity.

3. The *corroborative evidence* of the Divine unity. (1.) The self-existence of God. Two prime and original causes of all things are unimaginable. "If there is not one only God, there is no God." (2.) The infinite perfections of God. An absolutely perfect being must be one, &c. (3.) The supreme dominion of God: there can only be one supreme governor of the world. (4.) The analogy of nature. Everywhere signs of a monarchy. The unity of design observable in all the works of God.

The practical application of this subject is found in Deut vi. 5, compared with Mark xii. 29, 30.

III. THE GRACIOUS RELATION WHICH THIS GLORIOUS BEING SUSTAINS TOWARD HIS PEOPLE. "Thy redeemer"—vindicator or deliverer.

1. The *need* of redemption. The Babylonians had taken Israel into captivity, and oppressed them, &c. Man is enslaved by sin, led captive by the devil; his spiritual enemies are numerous, and subtle, and powerful; and he is unable to overcome them, &c. He needs an emancipator—a redeemer.

2. The *nature* of redemption. May be considered both negatively and positively — what we are redeemed from, and what we are redeemed to. The spiritual Israel are redeemed, from the love and practice of sin, to the love and practice of holiness; from death to life; from the service of Satan to the service of God; from misery to bliss; from hell to heaven, &c.

3. The *author* of redemption. The doctrine of redemption is often underestimated and undervalued, from an inadequate conception of the majesty of its author. In the heart of God our redemption took its rise. Effected by the sacrifice of THE SON OF GOD (see p. 438). Redemption was made possible for all Israel, but it was open to any to reject the privileges it involved. So Christ has died for all, yet the benefits of His death will be secured only to those who believe.

No other way of deliverance from the deadly evils in which sin has involved you (H. E. I. 443).—*A. Tucker.*

Little Wrath and Everlasting Kindness.

liv. 7–10. *For a small moment have I forsaken thee, &c.*

This precious passage is the property of all true believers in Christ (ver. 17). The people of God are often very severely afflicted. At such times there is powerful comfort for them in the fact that whatever the Lord may do unto them, He cannot be wroth with them, nor rebuke them, in the weightiest sense of those words. There may be much that is bitter in their cup, but since Jesus has made atonement on their behalf, there cannot be in it even a single drop of judicial punishment of sin, because Christ has borne all that justice could inflict. The Lord may be angry with us as a father is angry with his child, but never as a judge is angry with a criminal. God's little wrath may light upon His beloved, but there is a great wrath which burns as a consuming fire; and this cannot fall upon them, for He has sworn that He will not be wroth with them nor rebuke them. Consider—

I. What the Lord calls His "little wrath."

1. *Our view of it, and God's view of it may differ very greatly.* To a child of God in a right state even the most modified form of the Divine anger is very painful. This may lead us to over-estimate—(1.) Its *severity*, and, unless we are on our guard, we may fall into despair. (2.) Its *duration*. The time during which God withdraws Himself from His people is very short: "For a moment," He says; yea, He puts it less than that, "For a *small* moment!"

2. *After the little wrath comes abundant mercies.* Not merely "mercy," nor "mercies," but "great mercies." God's dealings never seem so merciful to us as after a time of trial. With great mercies will the Lord come to us, silence our fears, and help us to gather up our scattered hopes and confidences. These great favours are not to be sent to us by angels or external providences, but He Himself will bring them.

3. *The wrath is in itself little.* God's wrath against His own people, as compared with that which burns against the ungodly, is little, and it can never get beyond that point. It is the wrath of a *husband* against his wife (ver. 5); not the wrath of a king against rebellious subjects, not that of an enemy against his foe, but the tender jealousy, the affectionate grief of a loving husband when his wife has treated him ill. It is the wrath of a *Redeemer* against those He has redeemed (ver. 8). It is, moreover, the anger of *One who pities us* (ver. 10). "Saith the Lord, that hath mercy upon thee," is in the Hebrew, "Saith the Lord thy Pitier." It is the wrath of one who is tender and compassionate, and pities while He smites.

4. *The expression of His little anger is after all not so severe.* "I hid my face." Why? It is because the sight of it would be pleasant to us. It is a face of love; for if it were a face of anger, He would not need to hide it from His erring child.

5. *This little wrath is perfectly consistent with everlasting love* (ver. 8.) The Lord's own people are as dear to Him in the furnace of affliction as on the mount of communion. You have no right to infer from the greatness of your grief that God is ceasing to love you, or that He loves you less.

II. The great wrath of God and our security against it.

This is given in verse 8. As the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so if you believe in Christ, the Lord will never be wroth with you, nor rebuke you, so as to destroy you.

1. *The oath of God is our security.*

2. *Guaranteed by a covenant* (ver. 10; Ezek. xi. 19, 20; xxxvii. 26). Christ has fulfilled His side of the covenant by bearing all the penalty for His people's sin, and fulfilling all righteousness, and now that covenant stands fast to be assuredly executed on the Father's side.

3. *What blessed illustrations of our security* are added in verse 10.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1306.

The Departing Mountains and the Everlasting Love.

liv. 10. *For the mountains shall depart, &c.*

There is something of music in the very sound of these words. The stately march of the grand English translation lends itself with wonderful beauty to the melody of Isaiah's words. But the thought that lies below them, sweeping as it does through the whole creation, and parting all things into the transient and eternal, the mortal and immortal, is still greater than the music of the words—these are removed—this abides. And the thing in God which abides is all gentle tenderness, that strange love mightier than all the powers of Deity beside, permanent with the permanence of His changeless heart. . . . And grander than all that, we have the revelation of the inmost nature and character of God in its bearing upon men: "Saith the Lord that hath mercy on you."

I. The contrast between the apparently enduring which passes, and that which truly abides.

1. The mountains shall depart. . . . And so we begin to think that humanity is small and life insignificant, and sometimes we feel as if we were ruined and there was nothing left to us, and so my text comes and says, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my loving-kindness shall not depart from thee," &c.

2. The other side of that great truth. There rises high above all that is mortal, which although it counts its existence by millenniums, is but for an instant, and there appears to the eye of faith the Great Spirit who moves all the material universe Himself unmoved, and lives undiminished by creation, and undiminished if creation were swept out of existence. Let that which may pass, pass; let that which can perish, perish; let the mountains crumble and the hills melt away; beyond the smoke and conflagration, and rising high above destruction and chaos stands the calm throne of God, with a living heart upon it, with a council of peace and purpose of mercy for you and for me, the creatures of a day, but that shall live when the days shall cease to be. And so look how wonderfully there come out in these words phases of that Divine revelation to us, which are meant to strengthen us in the contemplation of that that changes. "My kindness!" The tender-heartedness of an infinite love, the abounding favour of the Father of my spirit, &c. What a revelation of God! If only our hearts could open to the right acquaintance of that thought, sorrow and care and anxiety, and every other form of trouble, would fade away and we should be at rest. The infinite, undying, imperishable love of God is mine.

3. And then there is the other side to the same thought. The consequent outcoming of the imperishable and immovable loving-kindness is what my text calls "the covenant of my peace"—that is to say, we are to think of this great, tender, changeless, love of God, which underlies all things and towers above all things, as being placed, so to speak, under the guarantee of a solemn obligation. God's covenant is the great thought of Scripture which we far too little apprehend in the depth and power of its meaning; and this covenant with you and me, poor creatures, is this, "I promise that My love shall never leave thee." Have you entered into this covenant of peace with God? Then you may be sure that that covenant will stand for evermore, though the mountains depart and the hills be removed.

II. A few practical lessons we may gather from these great contrasts here, between the perishable mortal and the immortal Divine love.

1. To warn you and me from setting our hearts upon these perishable things. What folly it is, looked at from the

last point of view, for a man to risk his peace and the strength of the joy of his life upon things that crumble and change, when all the while there is lying before him open for his entrance, and wooing him to come into the eternal home of his spirit, this covenant!

2. To stay the soul in seasons which come to everybody sometimes, when we are made painfully conscious of the transientness of this present. Whatever comes thou canst not be desolate if thou hast God's loving-kindness.

3. To give to us hopes of years as immortal as itself. We are immortal as the tenderness that encloses us. God's endless love must have undying creatures on whom to pour itself out. The hope that is built upon the eternal love of God in Christ is the true guarantee to me of immortal existence, and this all turns on the one thing. Come into the covenant—the covenant of peace. Take the covenant God offers you, close with the offer, and then life and death, principalities and powers, things to come, height and depth, and every other creature shall be impotent to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.—*A. Maclaren, D.D.: The Freeman, April* 29, 1881.

I. THE TEXT ASSUMES THE MUTABLE AND EVANESCENT NATURE OF ALL EARTHLY THINGS.

1. The Lord fixes not on things most evanescent, but on those which are obviously the most enduring. 2. Even these stupendous works shall be shaken and removed. The discoveries of modern science. The Bible assumes it. 3. May be regarded as a type of the evanescence of all earthly things. Of human nature itself. "All flesh is grass," &c. Of our earthly possessions, &c.

II. THE TEXT ASSERTS THE DURABLE AND IMMUTABLE NATURE OF HEAVENLY AND INVISIBLE THINGS.

These are put strikingly in contrast with the objects of time and sense (Heb. xii. 28, and others). 1. The benefits comprehended in the engagement. The favour of Jehovah—the love which He bears to His redeemed people. This love is traced up to eternity, and gave birth to the covenant of peace. 2. The nature of the affirmation. His covenant shall not be broken, His favour not removed. We are tempted to fear the reverse. He sometimes appears to withdraw His favour. His covenant is established on immutable principles. His regard for His people is unchangeable.

III. THE MOST AMPLE AND CONSOLING ASSURANCE IS AFFORDED OF THE CERTAINTY OF THIS FACT.

No higher kind of evidence could be afforded or even desired than that contained in the text. 1. We have the assurance of the word of Jehovah: "Saith the Lord." 2. We have an appeal to the exercise of former mercy. 3. We have an assurance of a personal kind, and therefore most encouraging.

The personal pronoun, more than once employed, may well encourage our hearts. When the mind is oppressed with a consciousness of guilt; in times of affliction; in the hour of death; in anticipation of the judgment.

Such, then, are the glorious privileges of true believers. Are you one of them? Have you obtained mercy, &c.? "Incline your ear," &c.—*George Smith, D.D.*

I. THE PERPETUITY AND UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD'S REGARD TO HIS CHURCH, WHATEVER BE THE REVOLUTIONS AND VICISSITUDES WHICH OBTAIN IN THE WORLD.

1. That God should be unchangeable in His own nature is a necessary property of His infinite perfection. 2. Of equal importance is the doctrine of the Divine unchangeableness to the general interests of religion. . . . Hence the incalculable importance of those Scriptures which speak of God's incapacity of change, and hence the value of the assurance of the text, as establishing our confidence in the Divine character, and furnishing a basis of certainty for our present and future hopes. Whatever else perishes the Church shall live, &c. You may take the text figuratively—or compara-

tively—or in its most direct and literal sense. What is true respecting the Church as a whole is true of every individual of which it is composed. The promise of the text is sure to all the seed. Many things may depart, and hope and life itself may depart, but God's loving-kindness shall never depart.

II. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO THE PROMISES RECORDED IN HIS WORD. The covenant of grace. The promises are made to Christ, and in the application of it they are made to us in Him. Confirmed by an oath (Heb. vi. 17, 18). Think of God's condescension in giving such a pledge. Come and rest your all upon this great foundation. By faith in Christ you become a party to this covenant, and have a claim to all its stupendous blessings, &c.

CONCLUSION.—1. Appropriate the character in order to share the consolation. 2. Expect faith and hope to be put to the test. 3. Walk worthy of your high expectations.—*Samuel Thodey.*

All earthly things are uncertain. But we have here something unchangeable. God speaks of Himself as having entered into a covenant respecting man; and He pledges Himself that it shall not be changed. Contemplate—

I. ITS NATURE.

In what sense can the Divine Being be properly said to enter into covenant with man? Certainly not in the sense in which equal parties bind themselves to do certain things on given conditions. Man has no claim on God, nor right to bind Him to anything. If God enters into covenant with sinful man it is an act of grace. He binds Himself. And man's interest is to accept the conditions imposed upon him. Accordingly, in the Scriptures, the term covenant is variously used to express the Divine purposes, promises, laws, dispensations, institutions, relations to man, established through the operation of God's grace. Thus the covenant may be viewed—1. In relation to God. Then, it is an infinite purpose and plan of the Godhead that sinners should be saved in a certain way. 2. In relation to the Mediator. Then it is the inscrutable arrangement that He should have a people saved out of the world as the result of His redeeming death. 3. In relation to man. Then, it is God's gracious promise, His purpose revealed and made known, that He will bestow the blessing on the persons described. It is, therefore, God's gracious purpose, plan, and promise to save sinners through the Gospel of Christ.

II. ITS PROVISIONS.

In covenanting to bestow salvation He meant all that leads to it—1. The sending the Redeemer. 2. The gift of the Holy Spirit. 3. The communication of spiritual blessings. The sinner is justified, and sanctified, and will be glorified.

III. ITS STABILITY.

It is assured to us—1. By the pledged word of God. Better than the word of a king, which has often been falsified. Better than the word of a father, which he may be unable to perform. Better than man's word of honour, which is not always respected. 2. By the past acts of God. (1.) He prepared for it by prophecies, types, historic events. (2.) He ratified it. Each form of it by blood (Gen. xv.; Ex. xxiv. 6–8; Heb. ix. 15–26). (3.) He sealed it. By His Spirit, which is the "earnest" in our hearts. 3. By the revealed nature of God. Consider the love, the faithfulness, the immutability of the Divine nature.

CONCLUSION.—Have you an interest in this covenant? Will you accept its blessings? You are free to do so. You are freely invited. Those who are willing can have no greater encouragement as to the certainty of obtaining anything than the certainty of salvation.—*J. Rawlinson.*

THE CHURCH, Vers. 11, 12.

I. The *distressed condition* of the Church. Without. Within. II. The *promised glory* of the Church. Completed. Adorned. Perfected with

grace. III. The *perpetuation* of the Church. Her children instructed—blessed with abundant peace. IV. The *inviolable security* of the Church. Established. Protected from oppression, fear, terror.—*Dr. Lyth.*

The Afflicted and Beautified Church.

liv. 11, 12. *O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, &c.*

These verses, which doubtless had a reference to the future glory of Israel, are in a spiritual sense true of God's people in all time. In them God sees His people as they often are, and as they will be when His purposes concerning them shall have been accomplished. We find in them—

I. God's people described. "*O thou afflicted.*" How often this has been true of the Church; of the individual believer (Ps. xxxiv. 19). "*Tossed with tempest.*" How often have heresies and dissensions shaken the Church to its foundations! "*And not comforted:*" all ordinary sources of comfort having proved vain; the true source of comfort not having been sought. How often it is our own fault that we are comfortless! Herein we are apprised—1. Of *God's knowledge.* How important is this, that God knows our sins and our sorrows! (John x. 14). 2. *God's sympathy.* The tone is sympathetic; the speaker is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. 3. *God's affection.* This is not a taunt, nor a complaint, nor a rebuke. Love speaks here: true love, deep love, Divine love. Mere friendship leaves us when our dark days come; but love calls us by our name in the darkness as in the light.

II. God's promise declared. We may leave all fanciful speculation and content ourselves with seeing here the contrast between the present and future condition, (1) of Israel; (2) of the Church.

This is a picture of a beautiful city; its pavements fair, its foundations firm, its windows—or rather its battlements—all radiant, its gates like a burning coal, its borders—its whole circuit—full of glory. We may note—1. That *God promises what is needful.* Stones, foundations, battlements; no city is complete without these. It is that which we most need that God offers to bestow upon us. 2. *God promises that which is valuable.* Zion is to be rebuilt, not merely with "stones," but with "precious stones." God acts like Himself in blessing His people. He gives the best of the best. 3. *What God promises He undertakes to carry out* (Josh. xxi. 45; xxiii. 14; 1 Kings viii. 56). "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Who will "taste and see that the Lord is gracious?"—*Walter J. Mayers.*

I. *A desolate condition described.* Apply it—1. To the history of the Church at large. Like a vessel in a storm, but always saved from shipwreck. 2. To the experience of individual Christians. It may be with—1. Outward calamities. 2. Mental griefs. 3. Foreboding fears. But God beholds with a complacent eye. He is no indifferent observer. All the relations He sustains breathe consolation (ver. 5). Make sure of the friendship of Him who is the pilot of the vessel, and then commit your interests to His guidance; otherwise when storms come you will have no anchor, and when death comes no hope.

II. *The gracious promise given.* Not only taken off the tossing wave, but promised a city rising from ruins. A promise of the final restoration of the Church, begun on earth, perfected in heaven. 1. The skill of the architect. God claims the work as His own (Eph. i. 19). 2. The strength of the foundation. Combining beauty and durability. 3. The beauty of the superstructure. What beauty like the beauty of holiness. 4. The happiness and security of the worshippers.—*Samuel Thodey.*

God's Pupils.

liv. 13. *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord.*

Teaching and learning are the universal and everlasting occupations of all mankind. It is well to learn of wise men; it is better still to learn of the all-wise God. A precious promise is this given to Israel, and through Israel to mankind.

I. The School. What, where, is God's school? The largest and truest answer is—1. The *world*, which to those who apprehend it aright, is not altogether a workshop or a playground, but a school, in which the highest lessons are taught and may be acquired. 2. The *Church*, which is a higher form of the school, where the teaching is, as it were, more advanced.

II. The Scholars. All who will learn may learn.

It is the education of *mankind* which is proceeding in this school; and there are those who do not know it, who little think it, who are the pupils of the giver of light and wisdom.

III. The Teacher. Upon this, indeed, all depends. The Lord undertakes to be our teacher. This office He fulfils by His servants inspired to convey His mind and will, but, above all, by His Son, the Great Teacher, "the Light of the world."

IV. The lessons. They are mainly—

1. God's *truth* concerning His own character and relationship to men.

2. God's *will*, which is the same as our duty, the summons addressed to our faith and obedience.

V. The discipline. Knowledge alone is no blessing. In all education the moral result, the influence upon character is of supreme concern. God's discipline is unspeakably precious. Just it is; and yet, gentle too.

VI. The purpose effected by divine teaching and training.

1. Knowledge. When of the right sort a priceless boon. 2. Character. The ultimate result of the highest teaching. 3. Usefulness. God teaches us, that, through us, He may teach our fellowmen. 4. Eternal life. Life is eternal learning, and heaven is the approach of the soul to Him from whose fulness it drinks in unfailing and everlasting supplies.

Application. There is needed, in order to learn, a lowly and teachable disposition. The cry of the heart should be, "Teach me Thy way, O God!"—*Homiletical Library*, vol. ii., p. 76.

I. The relation which believers sustain to the Church—thy children. II. The advantages they enjoy in the Church. 1. Divine instruction. 2. Great peace: "the peace of God"—profound, strengthening, satisfying, enduring, &c.

Ver. 14. I. The foundation of the Church—righteousness. II. The security of it. III. The comfort of it. Oppression, and terror, and fear excluded. IV. The permanency of it.

Ver. 15. I. The last combination of the Church's enemies. II. Its unauthorised character. III. Utter abortiveness. IV. The blessed assurance.

Vers. 16, 17. I. All agencies and forces are the creation of God. II. He licenses, employs, controls them as He pleases. III. Hence no weapon or power can prosper against the Church which He has redeemed.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

The Christian's Heritage.

liv. 17. *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, &c.*

I. The Christian's experience.

1. *Weapons are formed against him.* No Christian need expect aught else. As Israel's experience in the wilderness, so the Christian's in the world. The devil will try to hinder his progress, &c. The world, too, in various ways—by its cares, snares, &c. The law in his members also will war against the law of his mind. He must fight his way, "fight the good fight of faith," fight under the banner "Jehovah-Nissi," fight, "putting on the whole armour of God."

2. *Tongues rise against him.* From the days of Cain it has been so, and will be so to the end. Christians need not think it strange if they are mocked, maligned, misrepresented, all manner of evil said against them. So they treated the Lord, and so they will treat His disciples (John xv. 9). But while this shall be, more or less, the experience of every Christian, learn, over against it—

II. THE CHRISTIAN'S SECURITY.

1. *No weapon shall prosper.* His enemies may be mighty, &c.; but more mighty, wise, watchful, indefatigable and loving is his protector. He is perfectly safe. This does not mean, however, that he is not to use expedients—to watch and pray, to resist and strive.

2. *Every tongue he shall condemn.* (1.) He shall do it himself by well-doing (1 Peter ii. 15). (2.) God shall do it for him. (3.) It shall be done sufficiently on earth (Ps. xxxvii. 6). (4.) Perfectly in eternity (Job. xix. 25).

3. Let Christians see to it that they so live that men speaking evil of them shall do it "falsely," and God shall fully vindicate them.

But now the question comes, Who has this security? and in answer see—

III. THE CHRISTIAN'S CHARACTER. "The servants of the Lord." Only real Christians, to whom this security is given, *i.e.*, those whose faith is a real root within and bears corresponding fruit without. Many arrogate such promises as this who have no right to them. They only who keep the precepts reap the promises. We must be servants if we would be safe. It is he who serves that the Lord preserves: none other (Matt. vii. 21).

This security is further described as—

IV. THE CHRISTIAN'S HERITAGE. This description may teach us—1. That while he is a servant, he is also a son—son and heir. Each believer may say with John (1 John iii. 1, 2). 2. That his security is a thing not of merit, but of inheritance. It is a legacy secured to him by the death of Christ (Luke xii. 32). 3. We may be sure that a heritage from God is a certain possession (James i. 17).

V. THE CHRISTIAN'S TITLE.

1. The Christian's justification is of God (Phil. iii. 9). 2. His sanctification is of God (Phil. ii. 13). 3. Boasting is excluded. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" 4. His security is perfect. If God justify, who can condemn? (Rom. viii. 34.) And if God sanctify, He will perfect that which concerneth us. This clause thus explains as well as ratifies the promise, and, further, it tells us how we may secure this promise for ourselves. Righteousness we have not by nature; we cannot attain it of ourselves; but we may receive it from God. Let us seek it by faith in Christ, and He will be "the Lord our righteousness," and then this glorious heritage is ours. What a different one from that of the wicked (Job xx. 1–29).—*David Jamison, B.A.: The Homiletic Quarterly*, vol. iv. p. 538.

WORTHLESS WEAPONS.

liv. 17. *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.*

Old castles contain many relics of the past, and on the walls hang many weapons of ancient date. To such a place the Church may be likened. A divine and secure citadel, it contains not a few victorious trophies—signs of its enemies' defeat.

I. Some of the weapons that have been used against the Church collectively.

1. The first that we notice is very old. It was employed against Noah, Job, David, all who have been called to do great things for God. What is its name? *Infidelity.* But it has not prospered. Humanity refuses to be infidel. Sinners abound, not sceptics. Atheism, like physical deformity, is the exception, not the rule. The soul must have something to live upon. Again and again the foes of Christianity have become its converts in their very attempts to destroy it: Athenagoras, Gilbert West, Lord Lyttelton.

2. Behold another of these hostile implements. Its edge is keen; it

gleams with cruel hate; there are crimson stains on it. Its name? *Persecution.* It has inflicted frightful, gaping wounds; it has taken many an innocent life; history is full of records of its merciless deeds. But it is a weak weapon, nevertheless. It has purified the Church oftentimes, by driving away the hypocrites and leaving the true believers; it has increased the Church by scattering abroad its preachers, who in new fields have made fresh converts; but it has not destroyed the Church. It has not prospered.

II. But the promise is true of the individual believer as well as of the Church. How hopeful, how happy, ought every believer to be! The soul of the good man is invulnerable.

1. The weapon of SLANDER shall not prosper. At one time or another all God's servants are attacked by it. But in the end none of them is any the worse for it. God will take care of the reputations of His people. Are you slandered? Do as David did (Ps. cxix. 6). So you may smile at your calumniators. The hour of your vindication is at hand (Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6).

2. The weapon of DOUBT shall not prosper. Like other men, the believer is assailed by doubts; but they do but cause him, as they did John the Baptist (Matt. xi. 2, 3), to apply to Christ for their solution; and by Him he is settled and grounded in the truth, to which he clings the more firmly because he remembers how nearly he lost it.

3. The weapon of DEATH shall not prosper. He who trusts in God's mercy through the substitution of Jesus Christ need not be alarmed at this weapon. You probably recollect handsome, brave Sir Walter Raleigh's remark when he put his finger on the edge of the horrible axe which was speedily to end his life: "It is a sharp medicine, but it is a cure for all ills."—*T. R. Stevenson: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. iii. pp. 244.

The meaning of this is that the Church of God cannot be destroyed.

I. GOD'S CHURCH HAS ALWAYS ENCOUNTERED OPPOSITION.

It has been persecuted. Its Divine origin has been and is disputed. There have always been enemies that have sought its destruction, &c.

That the Head of the Church should expose His truth to attack at all, is strange at first sight. But, 1. Opposition tests the sincerity of discipleship. 2. Keeps alive the evidence for the truth, which otherwise might drop out of recollection.

II. GOD'S CHURCH HAS SURVIVED OPPOSITION.

Thus this word has been hitherto fulfilled. (α)

1. Through *persecution* it has been preserved.

2. Notwithstanding *enfeebling influences* it has been preserved. It has often been exposed to bad air. Formalism and superstition. Yet it has more adherents to-day than ever, and is growing.

3. Notwithstanding the attitude of *scepticism and unbelief.* Changes its front at different periods. Sometimes the literary history of the Bible is attacked; sometimes the reality of its facts; sometimes its miracles; sometimes its supposed incompatibility with scientific doctrines. Hitherto, however, it has always stood its ground, and emerges from every conflict stronger than before.

All this proves—1. That the Gospel, which is the life of the Church, is commended by the strongest evidence. 2. That the Gospel is perpetuated by supernatural influences. Gibbon elaborated five secondary causes of the rapid and extensive propagation of the Gospel in the first centuries. They are true as far as they go. But he slurs over in a sentence a cause still greater, namely, the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a continuous miracle. Conversion is always the work of God. Every fresh convert is a fresh evidence of the truth. 3. That God's Church and cause shall be maintained until its mission is accomplished. Notwithstanding all difficulty, all opposition, all new forms of unbelief, it shall fulfil this prophecy in the future as it has in the past.—*J. Rawlinson.*

(a) The language here is derived probably from courts of justice, and the idea is, that truth and victory, in every strife of words, would be on the side of the Church. To those who have watched the progress of discussions thus far on the subject of the true religion, it is needless to say that this has been triumphantly fulfilled. Argument, sophism, ridicule, have all been tried to overthrow the truth of the Christian religion. Appeals have been made to astronomy, geology, antiquities, history, and indeed to almost every department of science, and with the same want of success. Poetry has lent the charm of its numbers; the grave historian has interwoven with the thread of his narrative covert attacks and sly insinuations against the Bible; the earth has been explored to prove that "He who made the world and revealed its age to Moses was mistaken in its age;" and the records of Oriental nations, tracing their history up cycles of ages beyond the Scripture account of the creation of the world, have been appealed to; but thus far, in all these contests, ultimate victory has declared in favour of the Bible. And no matter from what quarter the attack has come, and no matter how much learning and talent have been evinced by the adversaries of the Bible; God has raised up some Watson, or Lardner, or Chalmers, or Buckland, or Cuvier, or Wiseman, to meet these charges, and to turn the scales in favour of the cause of truth. —*Albert Barnes, D.D., Commentary, in loco.*

The Divine Provision for Human Need.

lv. 1, 2. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, &c.*

The world owes much to the Hebrew mind, and the fine foreshadowings of the ancient prophets. Isaiah touches a chord to which all hearts vibrate, speaking of the birth of Christ, &c. And like a true friend of our suffering race, he sympathises with those who hunger, with those who are weary, and with those who are athirst. No wonder that this old book should still be welcome to man, should never exhaust itself, never grow old, because there is so much in it which appeals to the living heart of humanity. Take the text as an instance, which exhibits the blessings of the Gospel under the most delightful aspects. Consider—

I. How deeply the blessings of the Gospel are needed.

1. They are not blessings which we can do very well with, or very well without, but they are absolutely vital to our existence. The Gospel is one thing in all ages, and it is the one thing needful for sinful, suffering, dying man—needful to youth and age, &c. 2. But besides this, the thirst of the soul for something greater or nobler than earth can give, is universal. 3. The text especially addresses those who thirst after the blessings of pardon and salvation, who feel their destitution of grace, &c. How precious are Gospel blessings to those who feel their need of them!

II. How eminently adapted they e to our need.

Water, milk, wine, bread, are not more suited to the wants of the body, than Christ and salvation are to the deeper wants of the immortal mind. The real ground of the adaptation of the Gospel to man's need, arises from its power to meet the twofold difficulty under which we labour—the guilt of past sin, and the present love of sin. The Gospel experimentally received, acts with the fixedness and certainty of a general law, and becomes "the power of God unto salvation," &c.

III. How freely they are proclaimed.

Our encouragement to seek these blessings is as ample as our need is great. "Come ye to the waters," &c. There can be no contrariety between the absolute freeness of Divine grace, and the appeals and invitations to sinners in the Gospel. The doctrine of the Scripture is that all are welcome to Gospel grace to whom Gospel grace is welcome, &c. The invitation is very free and full, designed to meet all the discouragements of grace-wanting spirits. Come, and come NOW.

IV. How fearful are the consequences of neglecting them.

An eternal famine must be the result. The greatest guilt must be involved in the rejection of the greatest mercy; and by the grandeur of the blessedness of the saved, you may calculate the depth of the misery of the lost. This ruin is aggravated—1. By the thought that it is self-caused. 2. By the thought of the worthlessness of

the objects for which it is resigned. "Wherefore do ye spend," &c. Though the Gospel is absolutely free and gratuitous, yet its blessings must be sought. —*Samuel Thodey.*

We may term these words the Gospel summons, the trumpet call from Heaven to man, bidding him to the great fulness of God's redeeming love. The call reminds us—

I. *That the religious wants of man are* imperious, *and they are* universal. By their being imperious we mean that they have a power to assert themselves in such a way that we must *feel* them, however we may explain them. The opening verses of this chapter supply us with the strongest illustration of the religious feeling in man, for they describe it as a hunger and a thirst—a view of the matter very familiar to us in the Scriptures. And what more imperious feelings does the body experience than those of hunger and thirst? So is it with the soul. It hungers and thirsts quite as truly, quite as deeply, as the body. No thirst was ever more real than that described by the psalmist (Ps. xlii. 1, 2).

The religious need is also universal, *i.e.*, it is involved in the life of every human soul. It may be more or less developed, but the spiritual capacity is *there*, and will in due time assert its strength. We may say that the spiritual craving is—1. *Conscious, i.e.*, has become distinctly intelligible to the soul who is alive with yearnings after God. This is the state of which our Lord speaks (Matt. v. 6). 2. Or, it may be said to be *unconscious, i.e.*, all the elements of yearning and dissatisfaction may be there, though the soul does not recognise their true meaning and treat them in the right way. Hence we may trace the hunger and thirst of the spirit in the very perversions of life, such as the following:—Undue eagerness after earthly possessions; vices, by which men seek spurious happiness; tyrannies, by which they seek undue mastery, &c. These very disorders witness to the active spirit within, and the facts are everywhere present: "that religious instincts are as truly a part of our nature as are our appetites and our nerves, is a fact which all history establishes, and which forms one of the strongest proofs of the reality of that unseen world to which the soul of man continually tends."

II. *Our text announces that these spiritual wants are* provided for. "Come ye to the waters: come and eat." This is a great secret of the Gospel message, that it not only describes our need, but also offers the supply. The former without the latter would prove a cruel mockery. "The waters" here spoken of set forth the fitting and overflowing provisions of God for our wants. When we rightly know our need, we shall eagerly respond to His message:—*e.g.*, the Gospel declares—1. God's *love* for human souls. We are not Fatherless. With a deep and infinite love far beyond expression or thought, He cares for us (John iii. 16). 2. God's *help* for human souls. In order to attain to our true life, we need—light in our mind: cleansing of the heart: redemption from the power of all sin. All these things are meant by the one word salvation, and they are comprised in the saving work of Christ (1 Cor. i. 30). Salvation, then, is a great word, and it means a great provision. "Come ye to the *waters*." The provision is as wide as the need—"Every one."

III. *The* terms *are within the reach of all.* In this matter of salvation there is no privilege of aristocracy, or money, or position, or power. It is not a question of purchasing. What can I offer to God for what He gives me? All that I have, worth possessing, first came from Him: I have nothing of my own. In this respect we all stand upon equal footing before God. The richest has nothing to give, and the poorest is not kept back by his poverty.

And yet there *is* a condition in the matter which we must all face. There is *one* thing we have to do—we have to *come* to the waters. This indicates the personal trust and the voluntary

surrender that God requires of us, and this is what we mean by faith. The condition upon which God saves us may be fulfilled by any and all of us.

IV. *From all this it follows, that those who come short of the blessings of God's redemption,* are themselves to blame.—*W. Manning.*

Here are plain words, in which plain facts and truths are stated, for the instruction and encouragement of plain people. The prophet uses figures drawn from the common experience of common life to set forth the promises of Divine revelation.

I. MAN'S WANT. As hunger and thirst are primary and universal facts of human nature, so has man's soul appetites which call for satisfaction. We experience desire and need for true happiness, for the favour of God, for joy and peace of heart, for a law of life, for comfort under trials, for a hope, an assurance of immortality. Man's wants are real, numerous, and pressing.

II. MAN'S VAIN ENDEAVOUR TO SATISFY THE WANTS OF THE SOUL. As the miserable inhabitants of a besieged city buy the vilest carrion to stay their hunger, as wretched slaves toil beneath the sun for long hours with no wages in prospect, so the irreligious, in their folly and delusion, seek to satisfy the needs of the soul with the vain things of this perishing world; so the misguided and superstitious strive to appease the conscience with unprofitable observances (H. E. I. 2378–2387, 4627–4630).

III. GOD'S SUPPLY IS PROVIDED FOR MAN'S WANTS. In contradistinction from the foul carrion and the polluted waters of the world, we have here set before us the wholesome bread, the new milk, the pure wine of the Gospel of Divine grace. Here you may find in Christ a provision of salvation; in the gift of the Holy Spirit all spiritual help and guidance. The fact that the Gospel is from God is a guarantee that it is adapted to the necessities of men; and He has caused it to be published from His fatherly desire that our hunger and thirst should no longer distress and torment our spirits.

IV. THE GRACIOUS TERMS UPON WHICH THE GOSPEL OFFERS TO SUPPLY HUMAN WANTS. 1. The blessings of Divine love are *offered* to every one who both needs and desires them—to every one who will receive them by faith. 2. They are offered without any demand for *payment,* without money, and without price. In fact, it is impossible for us to give anything which can purchase them; and it is impossible for the Giver to accept any recompense save that of love and obedience.—*The Homiletical Library,* vol. ii., p. 117, 118.

THE GOSPEL INVITATION.

Men seek happiness. But they usually seek happiness in some wrong way. There is in many men a craving for religious peace and satisfaction. The soul's craving is met by this Gospel. Here is—

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF A PRICELESS BLESSING.

"Water," "wine," "milk." The metaphors come from the East. We must place ourselves in the circumstances of Oriental life. Wine, such as was commonly used in Palestine. Milk, so precious everywhere. Water. Travellers in the desert know the value of water when the supply is exhausted and no stream appears. Also those who have climbed a mountain on a hot summer's day. Suppose the case of a great city, with the supply of water completely exhausted. Suppose, by some change in the course of nature, water was entirely withdrawn from the earth. It would be speedily reduced to a dreary waste, where desolation and death would reign supreme. But this is man's condition when destitute of the Gospel of Christ.

II. THE TERMS OF A GRACIOUS INVITATION.

1. *The act which it contemplates.* "Come." "Buy." "Eat." This is the attitude of the Gospel towards mankind as distinguished from other religions. They say to poor, helpless, fallen humanity, "Go and do something." The Gospel says, "Come."

It is the attitude of the loving Father toward His wandering child; of the wealthy friend who says to the needy one in whom he is interested, "Come to me;" of the strong and gracious Saviour, Who bids the weary and heavy laden come. Can anything be simpler than to come and take what you need? To come to Jesus is to believe in Him, &c.

2. *The condition it specifies.* In many parts of our cities benevolent individuals have placed drinking fountains where men and cattle may quench their thirst freely by simply coming and taking the water as it flows. It is a good emblem of the Gospel, and of the terms on which sinners are invited to partake its blessings. When God provided salvation in Christ, He provided it on terms that illustrate its derivation from His love. He does not demand, and will not accept a price at our hands. What price could we bring? Our righteousness is an inadequate price. Self-righteous pride must be abandoned when we come to Jesus. He has paid the price. We hold our empty hands and take the gift. The condition of absolute spiritual impoverishment to which man is reduced, demands that the salvation be free.

3. *The characters it comprehends.* The consciousness of need is the only qualification. Have you seen the emptiness of the world, and are you reaching forth, even blindly, towards something better? He invites you to Himself, where you will find what you need, and more than you at present think of. Do you desire salvation? Desire is a prominent element of thirst (Matt. v. 6). Is there in your heart such a consciousness of sin as disturbs your comfort in it, produces distress, excites desire of mercy? Your case is described in the invitation. You are "one that thirsteth." Are you sensible of your inability to save yourself—your utter spiritual impoverishment? The invitation includes him that hath no money. It is addressed to every one. No need to hesitate because of unworthiness, or the greatness of your sin. This "every one" is equivalent to Christ's "whosoever." Do not exclude yourself from it.

Let me urge the acceptance of this gracious invitation (Rev. xxii. 17). 1. God's Spirit says "Come." 2. God's Church says "Come." Those who have accepted the invitation are bound to pass it on. 3. Your urgent need says "Come."—*J. Rawlinson.*

By these emblems are set forth—I. THE OVERFLOWING FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. "Come ye"—not merely to the water, but—"to the waters." "The waters"—1. Of *forgiveness*, in which all our sins are buried out of sight (Mic. vii. 19). 2. Of *purification*, by which every trace of defilement shall be washed away. 3. Of *refreshment.* II. THE DELIGHTFUL PLEASANTNESS, &c. The blessings of the Gospel cheer and satisfy like wine and milk. III. THE ATTRACTIVE FREENESS, &c. 1. The blessings of the Gospel are offered to *all.* "Ho!"—a call to arrest the attention of the travellers along life's highway, whoever they may be—"every one that thirsteth." 2. They are offered to all *freely.* IV. THE MARVELLOUS ADAPTATION OF THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL. "Without money and without price." APPLICATION. 1. To man's needs. 2. To man's condition—morally bankrupt. (1.) God's invitations are not mere complimentary words, such as are sometimes current in society—invitations made with a secret fear least they should be accepted. God is in earnest. (2.) Sincere invitations cannot be slighted without offence. This is true of invitations addressed by men to their equals; much more, of invitations addressed by men to their inferiors. The Queen's "invitation" is a "command." What excuse then shall we offer if we slight the invitations addressed to us by Almighty God? (3.) If we slight the gracious invitations which He has addressed to us, where shall we obtain the "waters" needed to satisfy our spiritual thirst, the "wine and milk" needed to sustain our soul's life? The alternative before us is to turn *to* Him and live, or to turn *away from* Him and die!—*J. H. Stewart: Lectures on Isaiah lv.*, pp. 1–24.

I. *The moral condition of the persons invited.* The description implies—1. A conviction of the need of spiritual blessings. 2. A discovery of the abundant fulness in Christ for salvation and enjoyment. 3. An ardent desire for the blessings of His grace. Are you thus thirsting, &c?

II. *The benefits they are invited to share.* Figurative expressions, pointing to the blessings of the New Covenant procured for us by the Atonement and resurrection of Christ. The phraseology refers—1. To their variety and fulness. 2. To their perfect adaptation. 3. To their gracious freeness.

III. *The nature of the invitation addressed to them.* 1. You are to "come." But where, and to whom? You are to come to the appointed source. 2. You are to come and purchase covenant blessings. They are invaluable. They have been procured by the Saviour. They are to be obtained as free undeserved gifts. 3. You are to participate in the blessings of the Gospel.

CONCLUSION.—What response do you give to this invitation? Some perhaps will make light of it—postpone compliance—begin to make excuse, &c. See what you reject. None need despair.—*George Smith, D.D.*

The benefits of the Gospel are offered to the perishing.

I. The *fulness* of the offered gift.

II. The *freeness* of the offered gift.

III. The *universality* of the offer.

1. Offered to all nations of mankind. 2. To men of every state, class, and character. 3. The salvation is free to the chief of sinners. 4. The offer of life ought, therefore, to be considered by each individual hearer as addressed personally to himself.—*J. W. Alexander, D.D.: The Preachers' Monthly, New Series*, vol. vii. pp. 41–44.

THE WAY TO TRUE HAPPINESS.

lv. 2–5. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, &c.?*

Having set forth in ver. 1 the perfect freeness of the grace offered in the Gospel, and its adaptation to the wants of sinners, the prophet now expostulates with those who are unwilling to receive it, and exposes the absurdity of thus refusing to embrace the only real good, while at the same time they are toiling in pursuit of that which is imaginary. The question presupposes that the soul is hungry, that it must be hungry until it is fed, that the gnawings of hunger will constrain it to seek food, and that the instinct of self-preservation, no less than the desire of enjoyment, will induce it to give anything it has in exchange for the necessary means of its subsistence and enjoyment; that the fatal error lies not in the seeking after something to sustain it and to make it happy, but in imagining that this end can be answered by the pleasures, gains, and honours of the world, which are not only brief in their duration, but unsuited in their nature to satisfy the wants of an immortal spirit. It is this view of man's natural condition upon which the invitations of the Gospel are all founded. Observe, then—

I. THE PROPHET MAKES THE INSUFFICIENCY OF EARTHLY GOOD AN ARGUMENT FOR FIXING THE DESIRES ON OBJECTS ADAPTED TO OUR NATURE. He assures the disappointed soul that happiness is really attainable. But is this indefinite assurance that there is a good sufficient and attainable, the highest and best offer that the Gospel makes to sinners? If this were all, the tender mercies of the Gospel would be cruel. The voice of God has no such "uncertain sound," for—

II. THE DIRECTION OF THE SOUL TO A SPECIFIC AND EXCLUSIVE OBJECT AS ITS ONLY GROUND OF HOPE AND TRUST IS A DISTINCTIVE FEATURE OF THE GOSPEL. God stands at the fountain of life, and cries, "Ho, every one that thirsteth," &c. Annexed to this gracious invitation is the specific promise of a sure salvation, "And I will make."

&c. (2 Sam. vii. 16; cf. Luke i. 32, 33; Jer. xxiii. 5, 6, and others). 1. The offer of salvation is specific. It is not mercy in general that is offered, but the mercies of David—purchased by the second David—promised to the ancient David, which he hoped for, which he trusted in, and of which he could say, "This is all my salvation," &c. 2. It is sure. It is a covenanted blessing, and it therefore cannot fail; it is a permanent blessing, and can undergo no change; it is a durable blessing, and shall last for ever.

III. ALL, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, ARE ENCOURAGED TO CONFIDE IN THE SAME ALL-SUFFICIENT SAVIOUR (vers. 4, 5). The connection leaves no doubt that Christ is here the subject of discourse. To the nations generally He reveals the Father, and brings life and immortality to light (ver. 5). In addition to the doctrinal instructions of this passage, we may learn from it a lesson in the art of invitation.

1. We must not address our invitations to a nature of which man is not possessed, but to his actual capacities and wants, admitting or assuming their reality and strength, and striving to convince him that they never can be satisfied by anything but that which is so freely offered in the Gospel (α). 2. Let us see to it, that this great offer of the Gospel be distinctly and specifically held up to the sinner's view, instead of suffering his mind to rest in a mere negative conviction that the world is not a satisfying portion, or allowing it to roam at large in search of untried sources of enjoyment. 3. Let no man be invited to a general, indefinite reliance upon mercy as an attribute of God, without regard to that particular and only way in which it can and will be exercised to fallen man; but let him be invited to a share in the provisions of that everlasting covenant which God has promised to bestow upon him.—*J. A. Alexander: Gospel of Jesus Christ*, pp. 345–356.

(α.) A strange plant, called the *nardoo*, closely allied to the fern tribe, grows in the deserts of Central Australia. A peculiarly melancholy interest is connected with it, owing to the fact that its seeds formed for months together almost the sole food of the party of explorers who a few years ago crossed the continent. The *nardoo* satisfied their hunger; it produced a pleasant feeling of comfort and repletion. The natives were accustomed to eat it in the absence of their usual roots and fruits, not only without injury, but actually with positive benefit to their health. And yet day after day King and his friends became weaker and more emaciated upon this diet. Their flesh wasted from their bones, their strength was reduced to an infant's feebleness, and they could only crawl painfully a mile or two a day. At last, when nearing the bourne of their hopes, they perished one by one of starvation, a solitary survivor being found in the last extremity under a tree, where he had laid him down to die, by a party sent out in search of the missing expedition. When analysed, the *nardoo* bread was ascertained to be destitute of certain nutritious elements indispensable to the support of a European, though an Australian savage might for a while find it beneficial as an alterative. And thus it happened that these poor unfortunate Englishmen perished of starvation, even while feeding fully day by day upon food that served to satisfy their hunger.

Is it not precisely so in the experience of those who are seeking and finding their portion in earthly things? They are contented with it, and yet their hunger is in reality unappeased. Their desires are crowned, and yet they are actually perishing of want. God gives them their request, but sends leanness to their souls.—*H. Macmillan.*

We are reminded—

I. OF THE SINNER'S MISTAKE. He seeks happiness in the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world; sustenance for his soul in mere confectionery, which may allure the eye and gratify the palate, but which leaves the appetite craving, and the frame unrefreshed.

II. OF THE SINNER'S DISTANCE FROM GOD, implied in the invitation, "*Come* unto me." Considered as a fact, how *astonishing* it is—that the younger and well-beloved son should be found in this "far country;" how *sorrowful*—that *he* should be a swine-herd, and be hungrily devouring husks which cannot satisfy; how *perilful*—what *must* be the end of this alienation from God, and this vain attempt to satisfy the hunger of the soul with "carobs"!

III. OF THE SINNER'S DISLIKE TO THE GOSPEL, implied in the exhortation, "Incline your ear." The evi

dences of this fact are all around us; what are its causes? 1. *Unbelief*—unbelief in the great fact that true happiness is only to be found in the service of God. 2. *Pride*, which rebels against the humbling declarations of the Gospel as to man's natural condition, and his entire inability to do anything to merit salvation. 3. *Love of the world and fear of man.* These things go together. Men shrink from the necessity which the Gospel imposes of adopting a standard differing from that acknowledged by "society," and fear that by doing so they will hinder their worldly advancement. 4. *Desire for self-indulgence.* The fact that the Gospel will make no compromise with sin renders it offensive to vast multitudes.

IV. OF THE GREATNESS OF THE BLESSINGS WHICH GOD OFFERS TO THE PENITENT AND BELIEVING SINNER. These are—1. *True satisfaction.* 2. *True and eternal life.*—*J. H. Stewart, M.A.: Lectures on Isaiah lv.*, pp. 25–40.

We have already considered the hunger and thirst which men feel in the way of spiritual cravings. Our text expostulates with those who resort to unhealthy and unnatural ways to satisfy those cravings in the pursuit of sin. It reminds us that—

I. Godless effort is misdirected, and therefore **foolish expenditure.** It is spending money for that which is not bread. Picture the folly which this would be in the case of famine and starvation. In spiritual matters this is being continually done. *E.g.*—1. The *mammon-worshipper* is doing it. He spends all his energies upon the tasks of gain. What does he get? (Luke xii. 20.) 2. The *voluptuary* is doing it. When the round of "pleasures" is exhausted, what is his reward? Vanity and vexation of spirit. 3. The merely religious *formalist* is doing it. Isa. i. clearly suggests what is to be got by the hollow pretences of religion (See also Matt. vii. 22, 23.)

II. All this involves not merely expenditure, but **spiritual loss.** "You labour for that which satisfieth not." Not only money, but strength also goes; and therefore the loss is not external to ourselves, but a *part* of ourselves. Labour wears men down physically, &c. So here: the supreme matter of concern is the *soul-loss* that results. Consider our Lord's question on this point: "What shall a man gain," &c. Even suppose we get the little *all* that we seek in the realm of mere materialism, what then? Think of the *soul* degraded, impoverished, helpless, hopeless. What can compensate for a soul in ruins? The life of the soul is everything to us.

III. This is a matter for **reflection and decision.** "Hearken," &c. Observe—1. One of the delusions of sin is that it throws men into a state of *indifference.* 2. The Gospel requires a man's whole *judgment and thought* (ch. i. 18). 3. The Gospel also requires our *voluntary* surrender and obedience to God.

IV. The **foundation of the Gospel offer.** "I will make," &c. Much is said of this Davidic covenant, and the brief interpretation of it is, that David's history runs in the line of God's saving purpose, begun in Abraham and fulfilled in Christ. *Love* is at the root of it all (chap. liv. 8; Psa. lxxxix. 28). Christ is the real David of our faith. In Him we see the sureness of God's infinite love (Rom. viii. 31, 32). All else is fickle, transitory, perishing. The one hope of the world that abides amidst all change is God's love. Here only can our enduring satisfaction be found, therefore give heed to Christ's own word (Jno. vii. 27).—*W. Manning.*

THE WAY TO LIFE.

lv. 3. *Hear, and your soul shall live.*

The great secret of all true happiness is obedience to the will of God. And the fruitful cause of misery and discomfort, is the spirit of indifference to the Divine authority and contempt for the commands of Heaven. It is there-

fore of infinite importance that we should be acquainted with the rule and principle of obedience, and that its delightful effect in promoting our happiness should be so exhibited to our view, and impressed upon our hearts, as to induce and secure the performance of that which God commands. This is one great end of the Scripture revelation, &c. Obedience is enforced by a regard to our own happiness. . . . Nowhere, perhaps, is this more conspicuous than in this chapter. . . . And in the text, the principle is again displayed, that obedience to the Divine will is needful in order to receive any good.

I. A GRACIOUS PROCLAMATION FOR AUDIENCE. 1. The Almighty Sovereign by whom the proclamation is made. Marvellous that He should stoop to speak to man, &c. Yet a latent scepticism prevails, leading men to overlook the fact that it is God who addresses them. God is speaking in His Word. 2. The solemn business to which the proclamation relates. The life of our soul—the life of God in the soul, &c. 3. The serious attention to this proclamation demanded. Several terms are brought together. Implies attention, humble submission, obedience (1 Sam. xv. 22; Prov. i. 24–26).

II. A MERCIFUL DECLARATION OF DIVINE FAVOUR. 1. The nature of the engagement proposed. 2. The peculiar properties of the covenant. Divine in its origin, eternal in its duration. 3. The invaluable blessings that flow from submission. These mercies are great, numerous, valid. Have you submitted to God? (Rom. x. 1–4).—*George Smith, D.D*

I. THE MESSAGE IMPLIED.

When we are commanded to "hear," it is supposed that there is a voice which addresses us. This is none else than the voice of Jehovah, who addresses us in this chapter with peculiar energy and feeling. In the first verse we have an epitome of the whole Gospel. This is the message implied in the text.

II. THE REGARD THIS MESSAGE DEMANDS.

"Hear." This command condemns such as do not hear the gospel when they have the opportunity of doing so. It also reproves such as do so only occasionally, and permit the most trivial engagements and excuses to keep them away from the sanctuary. But more is meant by hearing than your presence in the place where the Gospel is preached. Hear, 1. With *attention* (H. E. I. 2573–2576); 2. With *affection*; 3. With *believing application* (H. E. I. 2654–2658); 4. With *obedient compliance*; 5. With *humble prayer*.

III. THE ADVANTAGE PROMISED.

It is a *personal, spiritual, great,* and *sure* advantage.—*Thornhill Kidd: Fifty-three Sermons*, pp. 1–7.

How much of the language of Scripture is language of invitation! He who has the most and best to give is most free in disposing of it; and in this the Divine Benefactor proves that His thoughts and ways are above those of men.

I. THE BLESSING PROFERRED: the life of the soul. 1. The soul was originally made for life. 2. The soul's life is endangered by sin, the wages of which are death. 3. The soul is redeemed by the death of Him who was and is "the Life," even Jesus Christ. 4. The soul is capable of renewal and revival by the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and Giver of life." 5. It is God's pleasure that the soul should live. The true life of the soul is an immortal life. "Life and immortality" are Gospel gifts.

II. THE CONDITION IMPOSED: attention to the Divine voice. 1. A voluntary act. The first indispensable step in order to life is the giving heed to Heaven's quickening voice. 2. Submission and self-surrender. This is involved in "Hear!" for this requires that self-sufficiency be given up, and that God's voice be heeded as of supreme authority. 3. The approach and obedience of faith. "Come!" 4.

The condition is one compatible both with God's grace and with men's freedom. Desert is out of the question; by hearing men cannot merit or earn life. At the same time the condition imposes a true probation to all who are addressed. The terms of life are not hard; they are suitable to man, the receiver; they are honourable to God, the Giver!—*Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. p. 117.

I. *Reasons for a diligent attention to the voice of Christ in His Word.* 1. The majesty and grace of Him who addresses you (ver. 4, and others). 2. The great end proposed by Christ, for which He seeks a conference with you. That your souls may live—live a life of faith, holiness, happiness, &c. 3. The rich consolations which follow a devout reception of the Word. All the blessings of grace and glory. 4. The awful denunciations following a neglected Gospel.

II. *Requisites for a profitable attendance.* 1. Before you come—meditation and prayer. 2. When you come—with prayer, reverence, faith—Christ is present with all His capacity to bless. 3. Afterwards, aim to retain the impression. Where hearing ends practising begins.—*Samuel Thodey.*

CHRIST GIVEN FOR A WITNESS, LEADER, AND COMMANDER.

lv. 4. *Behold, I have given Him for a witness, &c.*

In going into the wide world and entering upon the stern battle of life, feelings of doubt and uncertainty are not unfrequently experienced, especially by the young. They are comparatively ignorant of the difficulties, &c., that are before them; they have heard much from their seniors of the snares, &c., in life's path; they have read many a story of moral wreck and ruin, or of suffering innocence and unprincipled prosperity, and consequently they often shrink from the arduous duties which spread out before them. How eagerly at this juncture of life do they long for some friend or guide to direct them, and when such an one is found with what unshrinking adherence and tenacity do they cling to that friend. What they so naturally and earnestly desire, and what we all stand in need of, our Heavenly Father has graciously provided in Christ, of whom the prophet speaks in the text.

I. GOD'S GREATEST GIFT TO MAN. 1. *The Person given.* His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (ver. 3; Ezek. xxxvii. 25; John iii. 16, and others). Given in purpose and in promise, He came "in the fulness of time"—the completion of the designed period, the exact date when all things were ready for His coming (Gal. iv. 4). What an infinitely great and glorious gift! manifesting in the highest possible degree God's boundless love towards us, for His Son was infinitely dear to Him, and sinners were infinitely vile in His sight (John iii. 16, xv. 13; Rom. v. 7, 8; viii. 32). "Thanks"—eternal thanks—"be unto God for His UNSPEAKABLE gift!" (Cf. p. 112, 113).

2. *To whom He was given.* To the peoples or nations of the world universally, as the subsequent verses express The Evangelical Prophet loved to dwell on this delightful truth—one of the chief glories of the Gospel (ch. xxv. 6, and others). The Messiah was given to be the Saviour, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles—the race that had rebelled, and were in a hopeless condition (ch. xlix. 6; Luke ii. 10; John vi. 33; xvii. 21; 2 Cor. v. 15; 1 John ii. 2; Heb. ii. 9). What "glad tidings of great joy!" Christ is God's great gift to *you*; receive Him *here* and NOW.

II. GOD'S BENEFICENT PURPOSE IN THE GIFT OF HIS SON. He has given Him—

1. *For a Witness.* The office of a witness is to give evidence of some important fact or facts. Thus Christ is a witness (Jno. xviii. 37). He states

facts. He is the great Prophet and Teacher, the perfect Revealer of Divine truth to mankind, of everything necessary to salvation. By the fall man has lost the knowledge of God, and Christ is the only source of spiritual light (Jno. i. 9; viii. 12). All who lived before His advent were enlightened by Him (1 Pet. i. 10, 11). He bore witness even unto death (1 Tim. vi. 13). (1.) To the beneficence of God's laws. (2.) To the mercifulness of God's character, manifested especially in His gracious provision for man's salvation—provision full and free, &c. (3.) To the justness of God's claims—based upon redeeming love. (4.) To the reliableness of God's promises. (5.) To the condemnation of the unbelieving and disobedient (Jno. iii. 16–19, 36, and others). As a witness He is (1.) *credible and competent;* His credentials are supreme; He is thoroughly acquainted with everything of which He testifies; He can be trusted implicitly without fear. (2.) *Faithful and final*, because Divine. False witnesses abound—beware! But this witness cannot be deceived, nor can He deceive us. Thank God for such a "faithful and true witness." Listen to, and confide in His testimony as recorded in the Scriptures of truth (Jno. viii. 12).

2. *For a Leader.* The same word is translated "Captain," "Ruler," "Prince" (2 Sam. v. 2; 1 Sam. xxv. 30; Ezek. xxviii. 2; Dan. ix. 25). The expression may be understood in such an extensive meaning, as applied to Christ as possessed of supreme authority and jurisdiction over the Church, and over the world, in His mediatorial capacity. This is the grand glory of Christ our King (Eph. i. 20–23; Rev. xix. 16). The office of a leader is to go before, to conduct, &c. As such Christ executes this office—(1.) By the instructions of His Word. (2.) By His perfect example (Jno. xiii. 15; 1 Pet. ii. 21; Heb. xii. 2). He never says go, always come; because He has gone before us in hardship and suffering, &c.

"He leads us through no darker rooms
Than He went through before."

(3.) By the light of His Spirit. (4.) By the events of His providence. He has never led one astray, but millions to a glorious character and heaven. Is He *your* Leader? Can you say, "He leadeth me"? What an unspeakable blessing is a Divinely-guided life (P. D. 1640).

III. FOR A COMMANDER (Zec. vi. 13; 1 Chron. xvi. 15, 16; Ps. xxxiii. 9; cx. 2, 3; ch. ii. 3, 4). As Commander—(1.) He enlists for the conflict against foes. (2.) He trains for service. (3.) He gives orders. (4.) He provides the weapons—not carnal. (5.) He encourages by His presence. (6.) He leads and goes forward to victory. Are you submitting to His rule, obeying His commands, fighting under His banner, &c. (2 Tim. ii. 3, 4)? Let not "other lords" have dominion over you—He only has the right. You have been called into His kingdom. But you cannot have Him as your Saviour unless you take Him as your Sovereign. "Where Jesus comes He comes to reign." Trajan won the heart of his soldiers by tearing up his royal robe to bind a soldier's wound. "The King Immortal" gave His *life* for you! But if you refuse His righteous reign your danger and doom cannot be exaggerated.—*A. Tucker.*

I. THE GRAND BESTOWMENT.

Christ is the greatest gift God could bestow, or man receive. All that He is, has done, has obtained, is given. This is a gift—1. We could not claim. 2. We did not deserve. 3. We did not ask. 4. We cannot adequately estimate. "God only knows the love of God."

II. THE SPECIAL CHARACTERS UNDER WHICH CHRIST IS PRESENTED. 1. As a *Witness* to the people. 2. As a *Leader*, &c. 3. As a *Commander*, &c.

III. THE REGARD DUE TO HIM UNDER THESE CHARACTERS. 1. Is He a Gift? Receive Him with cheerfulness, gratitude, affection. 2. Is He a Witness? Believe and rest upon His faithful word. 3. Is He a Leader? Follow Him in every conflict. Rely upon His presence and wisdom in every emer-

gency, &c. 4. Is He a Commander? Let your obedience to Him as a Sovereign attest your love to Him as God's chief gift.—*Samuel Thodey.*

I. *The representation afforded of the Mediatorial offices of the Saviour.* Numerous and varied epithets are employed in sacred Scripture to describe Christ. They are not empty and unmeaning, as among men; but describe a corresponding variety and excellence in His Person and work. Examine the several terms used in the text, and mark their mutual relation and bearing on each other. 1. As a Witness. 2. As a Leader. 3. As a Commander.

II. *The circumstances connected with His designation to these offices.* They are remarkable, and claim our best attention. 1. He is Divinely appointed. 2. He is graciously bestowed. 3. He was given for the advantage of a countless number. 4. He was given in such a way as to demand our attention. "Behold!" Contemplate the fact with astonishment. Put yourself under the guidance and control of this great Leader. Confide in Him. "Follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."—*George Smith, D.D.*

The Calling of the Gentiles.

lv. 5. *Behold, Thou shalt call a nation that Thou knowest not, &c.*

It early obtained belief in the Christian Church, that Isaiah was sawn assunder for predicting so freely the vocation of the Gentiles by Messiah. Paul mentions it as a proof of his moral heroism (Rom. x. 20, 21, with Ch. xlix. 6). These words were uttered long after this country was a part of the Gentile world; and perhaps, in importance, it is the principal instance of it, considering what we have become, what we have done, what we are doing, and what we seem destined to accomplish. The text calls for our attention —"Behold!" And what you are to behold regards the Messiah, and consists in these four things—

I. His audience.

1. *A nation that He knew not.* This seems a paradox. Did He not know all His creatures? The apparent difficulty may be easily solved, when you remember that the word "knowledge," in the Scriptures, signifies not merely intelligence, perception, apprehension; but approbation, regard, due acknowledgment (1 Thess. v. 13, and others). The Messiah did not, and could not, view the Gentiles with regard and complacency; He could not thus know them. There was everything among them offensive to the eyes of His holiness. Idolatry is the essence of all evil —accompanied with cruelty, impurity, &c. Yet we do not deem it impossible that the heathen should be saved.

2. *Nations that knew Him not.* It is true, they did not love Him, but they could not, because they were destitute of the knowledge of Him, "sitting in darkness," &c. It is not the reality of things, therefore, but the knowledge of them, which must affect and influence us (Rom. x. 13–15; Ch. liii. 11, and others). This implies, therefore, the importance of what follows; viz.—

II. His work.

He will "call." This takes in very much. He calls by the blessings of His gracious providence; by affliction, &c. You are all, therefore, among the called of God. Perhaps you have never, to this hour, obeyed His voice. But the calling here intended, is principally by preaching of the Gospel; for "faith cometh by hearing," &c. His calling by the Gospel is not only to inform, but to accomplish their pardon. His calling was to awaken their attention, and to justify the appropriation of the blessings displayed.

III. His success.

1. Observe the centre—"Thee" (Gen. xlix. 10; John vi. 68, and others). 2. The swiftness, "They shall," not *walk* to Thee—they "shall *run* to Thee" (Ch. lx. 8; Heb. vi. 18). What can there be in any case that would induce

a man to run, that might not be applied in a much higher degree to sinners, who are seeking salvation? The nearness of the danger? The magnitude of the object? The extreme want of it? The strength of their desire? The shortness and uncertainty of their opportunity?

IV. THE CAUSE OF HIS SUCCESS.

1. The glorification of the Messiah. 2. The season "hath," marks the certainty of the accomplishment. 3. The connection this glory has with, and the influence it has over, this conversion of sinners. His glorification is the ground of all our confidence in God. Surely this is enough to induce and encourage them. This glorification furnishes Him as Mediator with His power to save, and it ensures the salvation of sinners.

"This day this Scripture is fulfilled in *your* ears."—*W. Jay: The Pulpit.*

I. The Father speaking to the Messiah, assures Him of success.

1. *The Call.—Behold, Thou shalt call a nation that Thou knowest not.* Does not mean that Christ is ignorant of any nation, but that He does not know them as His followers, since they are not His followers. *And nations that know not Thee.* Perhaps, absolutely ignorant of Him; ignorant of Him, however, as the Messiah, the Son of God, their Saviour. He shall *call* them by His servants, His Spirit.

2. *The result.*—They *shall*, not *walk*, but *run* unto Him, indicating their eagerness and joy to receive Him. Has been partially realised in the past, is being realised somewhere every day, will be fully realised in the future. Every habitation of cruelty in the world to become the abode of peace and love. The dark places of the earth, to be lit up with the light of His Gospel. The knowledge of the Lord to cover the whole earth. Nations to be born to Him in a day. The kingdoms of this world, &c.

II. The cause of His success.

The nations will see by the agency of the Holy Spirit that God had appointed Christ to be the Saviour of man, and had glorified Him. May we give, labour, and pray, to hasten the dawn of this glorious day.—*A. M'Auslane, D.D.*

I. The condition of the Gentiles. Unknown. Unknowing. II. Their call. Effected by the Gospel. Eagerly received. III. The cause. Displays of Divine power. Diffusion of the Divine Spirit. Consequent on Christ's glorification.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

I. The gospel is for the world. II. The world is ready to receive it. III. Divine power accompanies it. IV. Therefore send it.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

GOD UNKNOWN YET KNOWN.

lv. 6–9. *Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, &c.*

There is a paradox in these words. They invite us to seek a God who yet cannot be found, to know a God who yet cannot be known. For where should we seek God if not in His "ways;" or how shall we know Him except by coming to know His "thoughts"? And yet, while we are urged to seek Him, we are expressly told that His thoughts and ways are as high above ours as the heavens are high above the earth. Is God, then, unknowable absolutely? Consider—

I. THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION RETURNED BY SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY. Science says, or some of her disciples say for her: "In the whole range of visible and observed phenomena we find no proof of God." What then? If men will go to the visible for the invisible, to phenomena for realities, how can they hope to find what they seek? They might as well go to the sand of the desert for water, or to the troubled sea for a solid foundation. Votaries of philosophy say: "In the whole range of human experience and knowledge we can find no proof that God is, or no means of coming to know Him as He is." What then? So far as their affirmation is true, do they say anything the world has not heard on still higher authority before?—anything which the Bible does not say again and again? "Canst thou by searching find out God?" No doubt we know Him, in part, by our reason. According to one great thinker, the starry heavens and the law of conscience are a sufficient proof of the being and rule of God to the thoughtful and susceptible heart. Still, it is an open question whether the logic

and researches of reason can carry us further than the position assumed by one of the leading expositors of modern science, who says, "that there is a God I can neither affirm nor deny; that we can discover and know Him I wholly doubt: and yet in my most open and best moods I am dimly aware of the Creative Power which we call God." And perhaps we shall never be able to *prove* the existence of God any more than we can prove our own.

II. THE ANSWER RETURNED BY REVELATION. The Scriptures, in a great variety of forms, do proclaim God to be above our reach. The Bible nowhere undertakes to demonstrate His existence, though it everywhere assumes and asserts it; and God Himself has warned us that we must wait for a full and perfect knowledge of Him until this mortal put on immortality. Admitting God to be unknowable, the Bible yet affirms that He may be known. We cannot find Him out to perfection, but He sufficiently and most truly reveals Himself to us in His works, in His Word, in His Son. Take the illustration of the text. God's thoughts and ways, we are told, are as high above ours as the heavens above the earth. But the heavens, high as they are, are yet known to us, and, though known, are yet unknown. The most accomplished astronomer will tell you that in the heaven above, as in the earth beneath us, there is very much more to be learned than he has acquired or hopes to acquire. But though "heaven" be so imperfectly known to us, does any sane man doubt that there is a heaven, or that it holds within it the sun, moon, and stars? We know at least enough of the heavens to guide us in all the practical purposes of life. And it is precisely in the same sense that *God* is both known to us and unknown. We cannot learn all that He is, all that He does, or all the reasons which determine the several aspects of His providence; but we may know, we do know and are sure, that He *is*, and that He rules over all. For consider—

III. THAT IN MAN TO WHICH GOD REVEALS HIMSELF. The pure in heart shall see God. The Bible says: "The righteous God reveals Himself to righteousness, the pure God to purity, the kind God to kindness." In proportion as we approach to moral purity and perfection, we possess ourselves of the organ or instrument by which we may see Him. Paul affirms that as we nourish ourselves in faith, in hope, in charity, we shall come to know Him even as also we are known by Him; and John, that if we purify ourselves we shall hereafter see Him as He is, and be like Him. Is not that the way in which we come to know all persons, and especially good persons? The child does not know his father perfectly; but need he doubt that he has a father? *Do* we not know that God is, although we are but children in understanding? Is not this scriptural, this Divine way of coming to know God the natural and reasonable way? It is not by arbitrary caprice that God often hides Himself from the wise who want to find Him out by logic, by quest of intellect, by force of reason and induction, and reveals Himself to the "babes" who keep a simple, sincere, and loving heart. It is only because goodness and purity and kindness can only reveal themselves to kindness and purity and goodness. The true way to know God is by the heart, by the great moral qualities and emotions through which we are most closely akin to Him.—*Samuel Cox, D.D.: Genesis of Evil*, pp. 61–76.

The Incredible Mercy of God.

If there be some who find it hard to believe that there is a God, there are others who find it equally hard to believe that He is good,—so good that He can forgive all sins, *even theirs*, and cleanse them from all their iniquities. The Prophet had been commissioned to carry a message to the captive Jews. It was that, heinous as their iniquity had been, it was pardoned; and that to the merciful and relenting heart of Jehovah it seemed as if they had already endured "double" for all their sins, *i.e.*, twice as much as their sins had deserved (xl. 2). Hence He was about to appear for them, to appear among them, delivering them from their captivity (xl. 3-11; lv. 12, 13). In this message, God was drawing near to them; finding *them*, that they might find *Him*. But sinful men, especially when they are suffering the bitter punishment of their sins, are apt to be hopeless men.

As nothing is possible to doubt and despair, God sets Himself to remove the natural incredulity and hopelessness of the men He was about to save. That His mercy is incredible, He admits; but He affirms that it is only incredible in the sense of being incredibly larger and better than they imagine it to be. *They* might have found it impossible to forgive those who had sinned against them as they had sinned against Him. "But," pleads God, "*My* thoughts are not *your* thoughts," &c. The main point of these verses is not so much that God Himself is unknowable to us, as that His mercy is incredible to us. If, then, we would learn the lesson of these words, and take their comfort, what we have to do is,

I. TO CONVINCE AND PERSUADE OURSELVES THAT THE MERCY OF GOD IS IMMEASURABLY, INCALCULABLY, GREATER THAN WE HAVE CONCEIVED IT TO BE, SO MUCH GREATER THAT IT NATURALLY APPEARS TO BE ALTOGETHER INCREDIBLE TO US. We must get ourselves to believe, that the more largely we think of the Divine Mercy the more truly we think of it, if only we remember that it is a mercy which does not condone men's sins, which calls upon them and compels them to abandon their "wicked ways" and their "unrighteous thoughts." No mercy short of this would be true mercy. To make men happy *in their sins* is impossible, as impossible as to make them *good* in their sins. For sin *is* misery. And even if this ignoble miracle were possible, who that is capable of reflection, of

virtue, of goodness, would care to have such a miracle wrought upon him? To be happy in sin he must cease to be himself, cease to be a man. What we really desire when we ask for mercy is a mercy that will be at the pains to cleanse us from the soils of evil and strike its fetters from our souls. And so long as we cherish *this* desire, we may be sure that the mercy of God stands waiting to meet it, to outrun all our thoughts and expectations, all our wishes and hopes. The very punishments that wait on sin, since they wait on it by a constant and invariable law are designed for our good. This law makes us terribly aware that we *have* sinned,—a fact we are very slow to realise. We ought to take the retributions which wait on sin, not as proofs that God has abandoned us and ceased to care for us, but as proofs that He is near us, so near that, if we seek, we shall find Him, that, if we call on Him, He will answer us. By His merciful punishments God is at once convicting us of sin and calling on us to repent, that, repenting, we may be forgiven, purged, saved.

II. WE MUST EXPECT TO BE CONVINCED OF THE PITY AND COMPASSION OF GOD, NOT SO MUCH BY HAVING THE KINDNESS OF HIS LAWS DEMONSTRATED TO US, AS BY LISTENING TO THE MEN WHOM WE BELIEVE TO HAVE HAD THE LARGEST EXPERIENCE OF HIS WAYS AND TO ENJOY THE PROFOUNDEST SYMPATHY WITH HIS THOUGHTS. This is a corollary from the conclusion, that it is not by arguments addressed to the understanding that we come to know God, or the mercy of God, but by experience and sympathy. Just as we come to know the righteous God by becoming righteous, so we may hope to learn more of Him from the men whose righteousness is far more eminent and conspicuous than our own. Just as we come to know the mercy of God by becoming merciful, so we may hope to acquaint ourselves more fully with Him by listening to men far more merciful and gracious than ourselves. Such a man, and teacher, was the prophet who penned these words. This man has a claim to speak of God with an authority which few can rival. And *this* is what he has to say to you of God,—that God's mercy transcends all your conceptions of mercy, that it seems incredible to you only because it is so large and rich and free that you can very hardly bring yourselves to believe in it. Isaiah's testimony is, that in all those painful, restless, self-despairing moods bred in you by the sense of sin, God is drawing near to you, and calling on you to seek His face; and that, if you do seek Him, you shall find Him.—*Samuel Cox, D.D., Genesis of Evil*, pp. 77-90.

SEEKING THE LORD.

lv. 6–8. *Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, &c.*

The previous context was addressed, in the first instance, to the Jews; and now the prophet seems to press upon them the practical question—What, then, ought *you* to do? Shall the Gentiles (ver. 5) enter the kingdom of heaven before *you?* How will you prevent it? By excluding *them?* No; the true course is to enter with them, or, if you will, before them.

But it may be doubted whether this is the chief meaning of the text. Its terms are in no respect more restricted than those of the preceding verses, and especially the first part of the chapter, which obviously relates to the wants of men in general, and the best way to supply them.

Notice in this passage—

I. THE REASON IMPLIED FOR THE COMMAND. If the words "while He is near" denote "while He continues in a special covenant relation to the Jews," then the command would seem to imply that by seeking the Lord and calling upon Him, that peculiar, exclusive covenant relation might be rendered perpetual, which was not the case. Or if, on the other hand, "while He may be found" denotes in a general way the possibility of finding favour and forgiveness at His hands, then the reason suggested is in no respect more applicable to the Jews than to the Gentiles. In this sense God was just as near to the one as to the other. The principles on which He would forgive and save were just the same in either case. The necessity of seeking, the nature of the object sought, the way of seeking it, are wholly independent of external circumstances. There is a limit to the offer of salvation, which is made to all. If there were not, sin would be without control. If the sinner could suspend his choice for ever, there would be no punishment. Even in this life there is a limit. There is a time when God is near, and when He may be found. There must be a time, therefore, when He is no longer near, and is no longer to be found.

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD IS TO BE SOUGHT. Not in this or that

locality. Regard not those who say, "Lo, here; lo, there!" "Call upon Him." But is no reformation, no change of life required? Not as the meritorious cause of salvation. It is purchased by another. But you cannot avail yourselves of it and continue as you are. The same voice which says, "Seek ye the Lord," says likewise (ver. 7), "Let the wicked forsake his way"—a common figure for the course of conduct. He who would tread the way of God must forsake the way of sin. How?—by a mere external reformation? No; the law of God extends to the "thoughts," &c. But this is still merely negative. It cannot be that what God calls men to is a mere negation, a mere abstinence. There must be commands as well as prohibitions. The mere cessation of former habits would be insufficient; nay, it is impossible. An active being must have something to seek as well as something to avoid. Evil courses can be really abandoned in no other way than by exchanging them for good ones. This is a dictate of nature, of reason, of experience, of revelation. "Let him return unto the Lord." The fact is assumed that all have departed from Him. The words may seem strictly applicable only to backsliders; but they are indeed appropriate to all mankind. Can any departure be more real or deplorable than that which involves, not merely individuals, but the whole human family? The terms of the summons do indeed point back to that original apostasy under the curse of which the whole race groans. In the exercise of faith in Christ, and of that repentance which has never yet failed to accompany it since the world began, and of that zeal and obedience which can no more fail to spring from such repentance and such faith than the fruit can fail to spring from the prolific seed, "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c.

III. THE INDUCEMENT HELD OUT TO RETURN. It is man's part to forsake his evil ways and thoughts, to return to God, to seek Him, and to call upon Him. None of these can he do until God enable him. But this is true of every service which man ever renders. Though unable of himself to do these things, he is still bound to do them. It is his part to do them; and when he has performed his part, what does God promise in return? What will He do for man? He will have mercy upon him. Mercy is the inducement offered, and mercy is precisely what the sinner needs. Without this nothing can be given, or, if given, can do him any good. Mercy implies two things, misery and guilt. In all of us, the two pre-requisites are found abundantly—misery present and prospective, misery not produced by chance, but by our own sin. To us, then, this inducement ought to be a strong one. But, alas! the sinner is insensible of his condition.

IV. THE PROOF THAT SIN AND SALVATION ARE IRRECONCILABLE. Ver. 8 gives a reason for the call to reformation and repentance. Here the same two words are placed in opposition—"ways" and "thoughts"—"let the wicked," &c., *i.e.*, you cannot walk in My ways and the ways of sin; you cannot think My thoughts, and yet cherish thoughts of sin; you must choose between sin and salvation. Many are afraid of hell; they are willing to be saved from it, but that is all. That slavish fear is the sum of their religion. They must keep their sins. Judge not God by man. God pardons nothing, or He pardons all. Man may be unforgiving when he is not just. God can be just, and yet not unforgiving. Man can be himself unjust, and yet condemn the innocent. God can be just, and yet justify the guilty. His grace will not save men *in* sin, but will freely save them *from* sin—since it will pardon sin itself to the believer, and whenever it pardons at all, will abundantly pardon even the chief of sinners—however foreign such forgiveness may be from human passions and human feelings: let the sinner hesitate and doubt no longer.—*J. Alexander, D.D.: Gospel of Jesus Christ*, pp. 357–370.

The characters here described. All

are sinners, but some have repented and obtained forgiveness; while some remain impenitent and unforgiven. To which class do you belong? If to the latter, this discourse is especially addressed to you.

I. A GRACIOUS PROCLAMATION.

The Lord "may be found. "He is near." "He will have mercy." "He will abundantly pardon." God is ready to save sinners. As a father, who follows the steps of his wayward son, unwilling to cast him off, anxious to induce his return, ready to receive him on the first indication of a change. His heart is full of mercy. He desires to bestow a full forgiveness and make the reconciliation complete. There is the fullest proof of this—1. In the atonement of Christ, which in itself and by the Divine arrangement affords a satisfactory basis for the exercise of mercy. 2. In the declarations of His word. 3. In the preaching of the gospel. This proclamation of mercy to man proceeds from the Divine love.

II. AN EARNEST CALL.

"Seek ye the Lord," &c.

1. *It is practical.* It implies that the sinner must not lie still and wait for some hitherto unexperienced impulse. In the work of salvation there is doubtless something he cannot do. But there is something he can do. The text demands action. Do that which lies within your own province and is in your own power.

2. *It is plain.* What do these directions involve?

(1.) Repentance. (2.) Abandonment of sin—God will save no man in his sins. (3.) Prayer. He is to be called upon. God's readiness and desire to save do not dispense with the necessity for prayer. He does not force salvation on any. He excites the desire for it, and then responds to the sinner's cry. The penitent is sure to cry. The first sign of a child's life is when it cries. (4.) Faith. Faith in the word of God, faith in the saving power of Christ, which, however feeble at first, renounces self-righteousness as well as sin, and rests simply in Him (Rom. x. 11, 14).

3. *It is essential.*

III. A SOLEMN MONITION.

"While He may be found." "While He is near." This is clearly a monition. It indicates that there is a limit beyond which the opportunity is not extended. The opportunity is limited to the present life. We will not enter upon the awful question of judicial blindness; the terrible case of those who so persistently refuse to see the truth of Christ that their blindness and hardness become a punitive infliction. Nor on the cases of those whose opportunities are terminated by removal of residence, or by sickness. Nor on the cases of those whose opportunities are cut short by the terrible occurrence of insanity before the gospel is accepted; except to remark that the question is fairly suggested, how they will be dealt with, who up to the moment when the condition of responsibility ceased to exist, failed to seek the mercy which had been proffered. We will assume that ordinarily the opportunity, the possibility of salvation, continues during the present life. But the text implies the termination of that possibility. The present life is the grand opportunity. There is none beyond. At least, whatever may be the principle on which those will be dealt with to whom the gospel was never made known, the warnings addressed in Scripture to the hearers of the gospel imply that, so far as they are concerned, no second opportunity will be afforded. And none can say how near death is. Accept the offer of mercy without delay.—*J. Rawlinson.*

I. A DUTY ENJOINED, viz., *to make the favour of God the object of our pursuit.* "Seek ye the Lord," "Call ye upon Him." We must seek Him; 1, *in the way of genuine repentance.* It is vain to think of seeking God without such sorrow for sin and hatred of it, as lead on to "cease to do evil, and to learn to do well" (H. E. I. 4269–4273). 2. *In the exercise of faith in Christ.* *He* alone has made provision for our return to God; and if we do not take advantage of the provision thus made for us, we

must remain at a distance from God for ever (John xiv. 6). 3. *In the use of those outward means of grace which He has appointed*, such as the Word of God and prayer. We cannot expect that God will work miracles on our behalf. If we wish for the manifestation of His favour, we must wait for it in the use of such means as He has instituted for the purpose of making such manifestation to the soul (H. E. I., 3444–3459).

II. A TIME SPECIFIED FOR ITS PERFORMANCE. There is one sense in which God is ever to be found, and is ever near us. But Isaiah does not here refer to His omnipresence, for that is perpetual. He means a nearness of God in a way of grace and favour, a readiness in His appointed way to bestow every blessing upon us. In this sense, it is the plain doctrine of the text, that there is a time when He is near us and will be found of us, and that there is also a time when He is distant from us and will not be found of us.

1. *This is a truth which holds good in the case of collective bodies of men.* For nations there is a time of mercy. God affords them in rich abundance the means of grace, this is the accepted time, when God is near and ready to be found. If these privileges are abused or neglected, there follows a time of wrath, and He will no longer be found of a people who have thus slighted His mercy. Examples: (1) Compare what is said of the Jewish nation (in Deut. iv.) with their present condition. (2) The nations among whom Christian churches were planted by the apostles and their immediate successors, now, as the just reward of the abuse of their privileges, groaning, for the most part, under the scourge of Mohammedan tyranny and imposture. How full of solemn admonition are these instances for the inhabitants of this land!

2. *It holds good also in respect to individuals.*—(1) With respect to every person who is favoured with the means of grace there is a time of mercy, in which, if he seeks the Lord, He will be found of him. Generally speaking, this is the time of the present life. More especially it is vouchsafed when, by means of His Word, His Spirit strives in our hearts. The hour of conviction should be the hour of conversion. (2) But for individuals also there is a time of wrath, in which God will no longer be found of them. If we neglect to seek Him until we are removed out of this world by death, it will then be for ever too late to do so (Luke xiii. 25). But it is by no means impossible that that time may arrive even on this side of the grave. If we persevere in acting in defiance of our convictions, if we refuse to yield to the salutary motions of His Spirit, He may be provoked to give us over to final impenitence and to judicial hardness of heart (H. E. I., 2349, 4249, 4250).—*John Natt, B.D.: Posthumous Sermons*, pp. 168-183.

Implies—I. THAT MANKIND HAVE LOST HIM. 1. This loss is caused by sin (ch. liii. 6; lix. 2). Sin has offended the Divine Lawgiver. Hence there is moral distance between Him and us. We are aliens, strangers, far off by wicked works. While man was holy he had communion with Him; but the pure One cannot commune with transgressors. We have lost the Divine friendship, image, &c. 2. This loss is the precursor of infinite and eternal loss. Who can fully estimate it? 3. It is a loss which no human resources can repair (Mic. vi. 6, 7; Rom. ix. 31, 32; x. 1–3).

II. THAT A WAY HAS BEEN DEVISED BY WHICH THE DIVINE FAVOUR MAY BE REGAINED. That way is through the mediation of Christ (2 Cor. v. 19; John iii. 16; Rom. v. 2; Eph. ii. 18; iii. 12). Formerly, the Lord was sought through sacrifices; but all were typical of the one great sacrifice offered up on Calvary. Those harbingers of the cross are now no more, a Divine Victim has bled, and the way of salvation is through Christ (Heb. vii. 25).

III. SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINELY APPOINTED PLAN OF SALVATION BY

THE USE OF THOSE MEANS SCRIPTURALLY SPECIFIED. Man has sought out many inventions by which to be saved (Rom. x. 1–3, with Phil. iii. 4–9; 1 Cor. iii. 11). 1. A deep conviction that we cannot be happy till we have found the Lord, combined with the renunciation of self-righteousness (Acts ii. 37). 2. Diligent inquiry and attention. 3. Faith in Christ and earnest prayer.

IV. SEEKING THE LORD REQUIRES IMMEDIATE ATTENTION. We are prone to procrastinate. Some say they are too young, &c. The Lord may be more easily found—1. In early life. 2. Under the preaching of the Gospel (Gal. iii. 1). 3. When under Divine conviction.

CONCLUSION.—The privilege of seeking the Lord is limited to the present life. Our opportunities are passing away, &c. Seek Him NOW.—*Helps for the Pulpit:* Second series, pp. 10–14.

Propose and answer three questions—

I. Why *you should seek the Lord?*

We could give many reasons why you should, but you cannot give one why you should not. That a man should be religious is the first dictate of reason, and the first command of Revelation. It is recommended too by the sense of interest (1 Tim. iv. 8). Seek the Lord for three reasons—1. Because you cannot be happy without Him. 2. Because you have much to apprehend from His displeasure as sinners. 3. Because you have everything to hope for from His friendship. "In His favour is life."

II. When *you should seek the Lord?*

1. Now, while He may be found. 2. Now, while He is near.

III. How *you should seek the Lord?*

1. Penitently. Renouncing the sins you have loved. 2. Believingly, without distrust. 3. Joyfully, without despondence. 4. Continually, without end.—*S. Thodey.*

I. *The character of the persons to whom the invitation is directed.* Partly implied, and in part declared. They are distinguished not by their excellence and valuable qualities, but rather by those marks which prove them unworthy of the Divine regard or consideration. Such is our natural condition, and hence to us is the word of salvation sent.

1. To such as are ignorant of God. This is implied in the exhortation to seek Him. Man is naturally unacquainted with Him. 2. To those whose characters are marked by the wickedness of their lives. 3. To those whose state is indicated by their thoughts. Men look at the outward appearance, God at the heart. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

II. *The nature of the exhortations addressed to them.* It is the manner of God and not of men thus to speak.

1. The import of the injunctions. These are suited to the characters of the persons addressed. They are exhorted—(1.) To seek the Lord. (2.) To the exercise of prayer. (3.) The abandonment of every sinful course. (4.) Return to God. No more neutrality. 2. The season to which these exhortations apply.

III. *The encouragements afforded to an immediate obedience.* 1. The promise of mercy. 2. A plenitude of forgiveness. 3. Confirmation derived from the experience of others: "And to our God"—the God of His people. The language of piety—the experience of those who have found mercy. The idea is, He who has bestowed mercy upon us, will be ready to bestow it on others. "I obtained mercy."

CONCLUSION.—Learn the duty of immediate return to God and submission to Christ. Come as you are.—*George Smith, D.D.*

I. There is moral distance between Christ and unconverted sinners. He thinks of them; they do not think of Him. He loves them; they do not love Him. He wishes them to do His will for their own benefit; they refuse. Awful antagonism. II. This moral distance can be removed. How? Not by sinners remaining passive. They must *seek* the Lord; know Him; *call*

upon Him; pray to Him; trust Him. III. A time when this moral distance cannot be removed. When will this be? No day nor hour specified. The duty of sinners, therefore, is to *seek* and *call* NOW. Do not delay for a moment, lest then it may be too late —*A. M'Auslane, D.D.*

PARDON FOR THE PENITENT.

lv. 7–9. *Let the wicked forsake his way, &c.*

I. AN EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE. Embraces three particulars.

1. *The wicked man must forsake his way*—the way of the multitude who do evil, the broad way which leadeth to destruction. We should confess our sin. But true repentance is something more than a bare confession of sin; it is a forsaking of sin (ch. i. 16; H. E. I. 4269–4272).

2. *The unrighteous man must forsake his thoughts.* It is not enough that the outward conduct should become moral, decent, and amiable. This is the case with many who yet know nothing of the grace of God in truth. Repentance, when it is genuine, strikes at the root of the evil: it will no more allow its possessor to indulge impure ideas, sinful thoughts, and unholy affections than it will suffer him to become guilty of gross immoralities and abominable crimes. It labours to expel from the temple of the heart whatever is displeasing in the sight of God, and endeavours to keep it swept and garnished for His reception (Ps. xix. 12, 14).

3. His evil way and his evil thoughts forsaken, *the penitent must next return unto the Lord*, like the prodigal son in the parable.

II. A PROMISE OF PARDON. Upon the man who really obeys the exhortation God will have mercy, and will abundantly pardon him. Penitence is the indispensable pre-requisite to pardon. Not that it entitles any man to it (H. E. I. 4225–4228); but it qualifies us for it.

III. AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO LAY HOLD ON THE PROMISE (ver. 8, 9). Before the truly penitent, their guilt often lies so clear and huge, that it seems to them that it would be presumption were they to hope for pardon. They are awe-stricken by the number of their sins, or by their enormity, or by the fact that they are the transgressions of backsliders. They feel that they could not forgive corresponding offenders and offences against themselves. See how the prophet answers them (ver. 8, 9; H. E. I. 2331–2337.—*Daniel Rees: Sermons*, pp. 170–186.

I. The resemblance between God and man. 1. God has His "thoughts." Multitudes of these have been manifested in creative works, providential events, the plan of salvation, &c. Man has his "thoughts." He is always thinking, even when sleeping. Cannot prevent him from thinking. This is the grandeur of his nature. 2. God has His "ways"—His methods of working. So has man.

II. The difference between God and man in regard to thoughts and ways. Might be illustrated variously; the text limits us to pardon. 1. Men unwilling to pardon. God extremely willing. 2. Men disposed to pardon a few. God ready to pardon all. 3. Men inclined to pardon certain offences. God will blot out all iniquities. 4. Where are the men who make sacrifices to pardon? God, to pardon, gave His Son, &c.

III. This difference renders a moral change on the part of man necessary. 1. Unless he does so he cannot have fellowship with God. Two cannot walk together except they are agreed. God does not require to change, therefore man must change or be lost for ever. 2. If man returns to God, He will most mercifully deal with him. What encouragement!—*A. M'Auslane, D.D.*

Man's Ability to Turn to God and Believe the Gospel.

lv. 7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, &c.*

God has done and is doing, in the work of Christ and in the work of the Holy Spirit, all that is needful for the salvation of every child of Adam, and having done this He now commands all men everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel. That man is able to turn to God and believe the Gospel is evident from the following considerations:—

I. The distinction between the work of God and the work of man in conversion. A clear distinction between them is manifest from what God is said to do, and what man is required to do. God says that He will teach man in the way he should go; man's work is to learn of God, &c. In short, God's work is to enlighten, to renew, to beget, to change the heart, to turn man to Himself; man's work is to hear, to repent, to believe, to turn to God. Hence it is that conversion is ascribed sometimes to God, and sometimes to man; sometimes to the Word, and sometimes to the sinner himself. And all this accords with the nature of the case. (α)

II. Conversion to God is a duty required of man. Conversion is a command binding upon all men. God commands all men to turn to Himself. Is not man bound to obey the moment God calls? Every moment he refuses, he is adding to his rebellion and guilt. But if man cannot turn to God, he cannot obey the call, nor is he bound to obey; and consequently, he is not guilty of disobedience should he not turn. It is impossible to prove man's guilt in not being converted, and deny his ability to turn to God. Nothing could be more striking and remarkable than the words of Ezek. xviii. 30–32; xxxiii. 11. See also Acts iii. 19, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" or more properly, "Change your mind and turn, that your sins may be blotted out." To change the mind is the same as to make a new heart and a new spirit. And surely man can change his mind when God shows him something capable of working a change. Man can change his mind regarding anything he learns from man; and surely he can change his mind regarding what he learns from God. The words, "*be converted*" in this verse, ought to be simply "*turn.*"

III. God never requires impossibilities. He requires and commands man to turn to Him, but if man cannot do so, then He requires an impossibility, a thing which God cannot do. God requires man to love Him with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and his neighbour as himself; but He requires no man to love Him more than with all his might; that is, more than he is able: nor his neighbour more than Himself. (β)

IV. Conversion requires resolute determination. If a man is not determined, he will never turn to God. Nothing is more necessary to conversion than earnestness and resolution; and perhaps nothing is a greater hindrance than want of decision. Many allow the religion of Jesus to be a good thing, and absolutely necessary to salvation, yet for want of manfully making up their minds, they live and die unconverted. Nothing could more clearly show man's activity in his own conversion, and his ability to turn to God. The necessity of resolution is clearly seen from the following Scriptures: Lam. iii. 40, 41; Hos. v. 4; these verses show what man wants in order to his conversion. Let him only search and try his ways, &c. But no, he does not like this. Here is the reason why he does not turn. It is not because he is not able. Our Saviour shows the necessity of resolution, when He says, "Strive," &c. Mark the difference between seeking and striving; *agonize*, as the Greek has it. Now if man has nothing to do in his own conversion, if he is unable to turn to God, if he is as passive as a stone, such an exhorta-

tion has no meaning; the half of the Bible becomes meaningless. (γ)

V. Unconverted Gospel hearers are those and those only who refuse to turn to God at His call. This refusal is the only reason why every Gospel hearer is not a Christian, &c. Men harden their hearts lest they should turn, and God should save them. (δ)

Conclusion.—What is your state? Have you believed on the Lord Jesus? Have you forsaken your evil ways and thoughts and turned to God? If so, happy are you; your sins are all forgiven; eternal life is yours. But if not, except you repent, &c., there is nothing for you but everlasting woe. Let me ask you: why have you not believed? Do you think you are unable? How strange that you should be able to believe man, and not be able to believe God! &c. "Awake, thou that sleepest," &c.—*F. Johnston: The Work of God and Man in Conversion*, pp. 110–124.

(α) Suppose a traveller is on a wrong road, and another calls him to turn, and he believes and obeys the call. What then? The other turned him, his word turned him, and he turned himself. There is no contradiction here. So in conversion. God calls all men to turn from their wicked ways; one hears and obeys the call. What then? God turned him, His word turned him, and he turned himself. Suppose the traveller refused to hear and believe the call, he would not have turned. So, in like manner, if the sinner refuse to hear and obey the call of God, he is not converted; God does not turn him, because he would not turn. In what sense the work of the fall was Satan's, the work of conversion is God's; in what sense the work of the fall was our first parents', the work of conversion is man's.—*Johnston.*

(β) We refer to this both as an apt illustration, and because some entertain the most extraordinary notion that this is an instance of God's requiring of man an impossibility. Such a notion is a positive slight against the character of God. We are told that man is fallen and depraved; true, but still God does not require man to love Him beyond the strength which He has given him. The word is "with all thy might," not beyond thy might. There can be only two cases in which man cannot turn to God and believe in Jesus. The one is the case of those who have not the truth—the means by which God turns man to Himself. The other is the case of those who have not faculties of mind capable of understanding and receiving the truth.

The former are destitute of objective ability; the latter of subjective ability, without both of which it is impossible to believe in Jesus. Any man who comes under one or other of these cases will never be punished for unbelief. This is plainly taught by our Lord, in John ix. 41; xv. 22-24. All those, therefore, who have the truth, the gospel, and the faculty—mind, are able to turn to God and believe in Jesus. God commands them to do so, and He will not command what is not duty; and that cannot be duty to a man which the man is not able to do. It is not a blind man's duty to see; nor a deaf man's to hear; no more is it the duty of man to believe if he cannot believe. Our Saviour frequently alludes to this very thought, when He so often says, "He who hath ears to hear, let him hear." And mark how He remonstrates with His disciples (Mark viii. 18).—*Johnston*

(γ) The prodigal son affords a pleasing illustration of resolution, and of man's ability to turn to God. The rich young man is an affecting illustration of the fatal consequences of wanting resolution. He came to our Lord, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life; yet when he found that he must sell all which he had and follow Jesus, he was not ready to make such a sacrifice. The truth is, his mind was not made up to have eternal life at all costs; and, for want of this resolution, he lost all. What a fatal choice! Will you make the same, or resolve, come what will, to have eternal life?—*Johnston.*

(δ) This is evident from our Lord's quotation from Isaiah, in Matt. xiii. 15. Paul also quotes the same words as being the reason why the Jews at Rome believed not his preaching (Acts xxviii. 17). Those who hear the Word and are not converted, are those only who put it away from them, judging themselves unworthy of everlasting life, as Paul told the Jews at Antioch (Acts xiii. 46). Those who hear the Word, and turn to God, are those and those only who take it to themselves, and are bent upon everlasting life at all hazards. The manner in which some account for the difference between gospel hearers, ascribing it to election and the sovereign withholding or bestowing of a special influence, arises from mistaken views of Scripture statements, and is utterly subversive of the responsibility of man. We believe that upon no other view of the case than that which we have stated can the calls and invitations of the Gospel, and the promises and threatenings attached to them, have any meaning or consistency. Mark the words of the glorious invitation in vers. 1–7. In the same manner we might examine all the calls, promises, and threatenings of the gospel; all teaching the same thing—man's duty, ability, and consequent responsibility. What is the difference between him who believeth, and him who believeth not (John iii. 18, 36)? But if the sinner is not able to believe, these promises and threatenings have no consistency. But no; the sinner who believes not is righteously condemned, because he is able to believe, but stubbornly refuses to obey God.—*Johnston.*

God's Way of Pardoning above Men's.

Isa. lv. 8, 9. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, &c.*

Suppose your sovereign taking a personal interest in you. But you have become a rebel. She has every justification in casting you off. Instead of this she makes an arrangement at great cost by which she is able to offer a free pardon. And this purely because of the benevolent interest she takes in you.

Think of the Divine greatness (2 Chron. vi. 18) and holiness. Contrast these with our littleness and sinfulness. Yet He offers pardon. He will have mercy. It is because His thoughts and ways are higher than ours. You cannot measure the distance between heaven and earth. You only think of it as immeasurable vastness. This is true in relation to every thought and every action about subjects on which we think or act. Especially so as regards forgiveness. God's magnanimity is asserted here. It is illustrated—

I. In the disposition to forgive.

How different from man! When injured he seeks revenge. Usually difficult to turn aside from this. God's nature is to forgive (Ex. xxxiv. 5–7). This is one phase of His love.

II. In the terms of forgiveness.

The statement of this part of the case involves the fact that He not merely stands in the attitude of readiness to forgive, but also that He overcame the formidable difficulties in the way of forgiveness. And this at great cost and sacrifice. We hear much at present of the demands of man's moral nature. One demand of our moral nature is that the supreme ruler be just, as a primary condition of our confidence and respect. Here, then, was the problem that demanded solution. And God's thoughts were equal to it. When in His love He desired to exercise mercy, He in His wisdom discovered a way by which mercy could be exercised while justice should be satisfied. By the sacrifice of His dear Son. A Divine victim for human sin. God vindicates His justice in the forgiveness of sin on the ground of the satisfaction He has made (Rom. iii. 25, 26). Hence the terms, so far as we are concerned, are perfectly free (ver. 1). Salvation is not of works, but grace. You have simply to trust.

III. In the completeness of forgiveness.

Remember the number and aggravation of your sins. Remember God's hatred of sin. Yet He forgives fully. Casts them into the depths of the sea. Blots them out as a cloud. Will not remember them. Men remember offences against them, and make a difference. God forgets them.

IV. In the range of forgiveness.

The promises and invitations and overtures of the Gospel are made to all sinners everywhere. "Whosoever will let him come." There is sufficient in God's love, sufficient in Christ's blood for all. If all mankind would come they would find the ample provision and the loving heart. Nor shall His mercy be provided in vain (ver. 10, 11, &c.)

So magnanimous is God. So much higher than ours are His thoughts and ways. They are the thoughts that are unfolded in the proclamation of mercy to sinners in the Gospel. It is gracious; necessary; all-sufficient.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The Mystery and Glory of God's Ways in Redemption.

The whole Bible is but the expansion of one sentence, one utterance of the Eternal, "I am the Lord." Hence the revelation must be incomplete, for a god that could fully reveal himself to his creatures would be no god; and it must also be astonishing and amazing, for a professed record of any part of God's thoughts and ways that did not land in mystery, and tend to wonder would be self-condemned, and proved to be neither true nor divine

It is not only here and there that God's thoughts and ways are superhuman, but throughout; just as a circle is everywhere a circle, and nowhere a square or capable at any point of being reduced to the other figure. How man can at all lay hold of God, or frame any conception of Him with his finite and infinitely inferior mental faculties, this is the wonder and has sometimes been the stumbling-block of philosophy; and it is only removed out of the way by devoutly and thankfully accepting the fact that we do know Him (though darkly), and are so far made in His image that there may be and ought to be reverential contact and communion with Him. We must be constantly reminded that though brought near we are not brought up to Him, though companions we are not equals, and that while our line touches His, it cannot run parallel with it as it sweeps in its own awful circle from eternity to eternity. The lesson is one of humility but also of consolation; for the depths of God's mind are depths of truth, of wisdom, and of love; and therefore we may be not only cast down, but lifted up as we study together in this lofty chapter the great words: "For my thoughts," &c. In order to give unity to the subject I shall say nothing of the ways of God in creation and natural providence, but limit myself to redemption, showing how in various departments the ways of God are superhumanly mysterious and yet divinely glorious. God's ways are not our ways, nor our thoughts His thoughts—

I. *In regard to the* **occasion** *of redemption.*—Take the entrance of sin into our world, and its continuance in it, which occasioned the need of redemption—can anything be less like what man would have anticipated and conceived. (α)

II. *In regard to the* **purpose** *of redemption.* Man is not the only being who has fallen, and yet man is the only being who is redeemed. When we inquire as to the reason of this arrangement we find none. It is one of the deep things which belong to God. It is an impressive display of sovereignty, where all that is left for us is to bow and to adore. We might have supposed that the higher race would have been selected, and that God would have glorified His mercy on the still more conspicuous theatre from which they had sought to cast themselves down. And altogether independently of the example of their rejection, we might have anticipated that man's ruin would have been final and hopeless. Man does not forgive where he has been insulted as God was in man's rebellion. Nations do not tolerate blows aimed at their independence and their very existence, and therefore man's revolt might have been expected to draw down swift and remediless destruction, for it was a blow aimed at God's throne and being. That God's thoughts should in such a crisis have been thoughts of peace is the wonder of unfallen beings and of those who are redeemed. They cannot rise in thought to that awful council wherein, though every foreseen trespass demanded vengeance, mercy yet rejoiced against judgment, without exclaiming, "This is not the manner of man, O Lord God." "O the depth of the riches," &c.

III. *In regard to the* **plan** *of redemption.* How utterly unlike to any means of man's devising are those which God has chosen for the recovery of His lost creation to His favour and image! That God's Son should become incarnate, and die on the cross for the world's redemption, and that God's Spirit should descend into the guilty and polluted hearts of sinners, and work out there a blessed transformation, and that all this should be effected by the free and sovereign grace of God himself, and laid open to the very chief of sinners as the unconditional gift of God's love, this, as universal experience attests, is something so far from having entered into the heart of man, that it needs incessant effort to keep it before him even when it has been revealed. (β)

The grandeur of these provisions comes home with a consoling and

peace-giving as well as purifying power to the sin-burdened conscience and heart. They reveal the majesty and strength as well as the love of the Godhead, and are thus the support and stay of dying men. Never can we surrender this Godlike greatness of the Gospel, or suffer this high stronghold to be dismantled and destroyed. It were to surrender our own soul's refuge, and that of all the guilty, and with a heaven above that stooped not to our rescue, and an earth at our foot that crumbled to our tread, to sink unpitied in the waste of sin and ruin.

IV. *In regard to the* progress *of redemption.* Redemption has a history, and this is, of all others, the most difficult to scan, not only as it lies in the Bible, but in uninspired records. It has been said, "Interpret the Bible as any other book;" but this ultimately means, "Interpret God as you interpret man," and you cannot even interpret Church history as you do other history. It is, in a sense which belongs to no other history, the story of a battle not yet fought out, or of a campaign not yet ended; and there are combatants at work beyond the range of human observation, and a supreme celestial Leader whose point of survey none can share. It was to be expected, therefore, that the progress of redemption, as surveyed by human eyes, would present many anomalies and many difficulties, while at the same time, true to the analogy of the substance of redemption, there would be a lofty, all-pervading grandeur that spoke to the devout observer the presence and the hand of God. I will illustrate this union of mysteriousness and Divine greatness in regard to three features in the progress of redemption.

1. The *rate* of the progress of redemption. How much is there here, unlike the thoughts of man! But no one can deny that there is a Divine hand in the onward movements, and that *it is all the more* glorious for its incessant recovery from retardation and retrogression. When the whole is known it will be pre-eminently Godlike, and it will be seen that God's law of progress, both as to time and space, was as far above man's law as the heavens above the earth.

2. The *instruments* of the progress of redemption. How unlike all that man would have conceived or devised! This applies even to the Old Testament dispensation, but far more to Christianity. Its leaders were the poor; its soldiers were slaves and women; its heroes were martyrs. How unlike the agents in any other revolution, and yet God chose "the weak things to confound the mighty," &c. By similar instrumentalities has Christianity perpetually renewed its strength. What new development of glorious possibilities, undreamt of before, has the Gospel everywhere achieved and made tributary to its progress! Nothing so unlike to human predictions, nothing so far above human thought as the march of this Gospel.

3. The *hindrances* to the progress of redemption. Man would have thought that hindrances would be speedily removed, or, if suffered to remain or to return, would constitute unmingled evils to the Church. But God, on the other hand, we can see, by giving the victory slowly, trains the faith and courage of successive generations; and by permitting old enemies to return or new ones to spring up, shows the unexhausted and inexhaustible power of His Gospel to face and put down every hostile power. The variety and vicissitude of attack when it is once surmounted, surrounds the Gospel with richer trophies and places on its head more crowns. As it has been so it shall be. The onsets of unbelief that now disturb us shall be the consolation of our successors, and its scarce-remembered names and war-cries shall swell their song of peace.

V. *In regard to the* limits *of redemption.* Why should redemption have limits at all? Why should not all be saved as God wishes, and come to a knowledge of the truth? Thus man fondly argues, and by arguing like this not a few are in our day plausibly deceived, in forgetfulness of the warnings of conscience and the solemn voice

of God, to the effect that he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. On this awful subject we cannot in this darkling state profess to justify the ways of God to man, for this He will do Himself in the day of the revelation of His righteous judgment. But it may be seen, even here, that whatever God appoints for the impenitent, cannot be inconsistent with His moral attributes. If the cross clears God from every aspersion in regard to the entrance of evil, not less does it do so in regard to the continuance of evil in His universe. What He has done in Christ is a sufficient proof that the fault is not His, and that man is the author of his own undoing.

Of this let us be sure, that though His ways are above us, they are so only as the heavens to supply a pathway for the sun and a fountain for the dew, and that shall break in blessings on our head.—*Professor John Cairns, D.D.*

(α) Had man been able to make a creature like himself, he would either have made him without any inward liability to fall, or any possible risk from without, and if he could not or would not exclude both, he would have made no creation at all. This is the way in which an earthly philanthropist would act in such a supposed case, and therefore in his hands sin could never enter at all, and hence the extreme difficulty, we may say impossibility, of accounting for the origin of evil on any theory framed in the present state by the human mind. I have read over many such theories and considered them; but to my mind this one verse is far more true and far more philosophical than all of them put together: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." We are sure on the one hand that there is a God, we are equally sure also that there is evil in His universe. Hence there must be something yet to be cleared up, something that without alienating from God His moral attributes, making Him either the author of sin, or the accomplice in it, for any fancied exaltation of His character would, if known, vindicate His ways and show them to be not only mysterious but right, as far above ours as the heavens are above the earth. Absolute faith might here come in and wait the disclosure of the mystery, why evil entered and wrought its ravages, and why it remains and works them still. But there are in the Gospel some further glimpses, not in the way of full explanation, but of indirect reference to this awful subject, whereby simple and naked faith in God may be assisted. These do not warrant us to say that evil entered *in order that* God might glorify Himself in overcoming it, or that the fall was a necessary stepping-stone to redemption; for language like this aspires to rise to a giddy height where the finite mind cannot support itself and where it mistakes its own reasonings or fancies for the thoughts of God. But the lessons of Scripture, while leaving the entrance of evil in its awful mystery, assist our faith by showing first that nothing derogatory to God could be implied in its introduction, and then that God dealing with it as a fact has overruled it for His own glory. The shadow which the entrance of evil casts on God's redemption rolls away. It was not for want of power in God that sin entered, for in Christ He defeats it. It was not for want of righteousness, for redemption is one continued death-blow to its dominion. It was not for want of wisdom, for the wisdom that cures is higher than the wisdom that was required to prevent. It was not for want of love, for the love that provided the second Adam to humanity could not have been wanting in the trial of the first. There is thus a reply on Calvary to the vexing thoughts that cluster around Eden, and while the mystery remains it loses its terror. And further, the undoubted outburst of the glory of God on the darkened theatre of sin, though we dare not say that the theatre was darkened *for the purpose*, assists our faith in God. It has been conclusively shown that evil can be overruled for good, that attributes of God are brought out that might otherwise have slumbered, and emotions called forth in His creatures which without danger and deliverance would have been impossible. Where sin abounded grace has much more abounded. God has become more glorious in His dealings with sin for its expulsion; saved sinners more blessed, angels more instructed and confirmed. The thoughts of God all through have been unlike the thoughts of man, and yet there are gleams from a higher heaven sufficient to relieve the darkness and point to the day when it shall be dispelled; and thus is vindicated the assertion that in this matter His ways are as much above our ways as the heavens are above the earth.—*Cairns.*

(β) The world had four thousand years to learn the lesson. God had made the outline of it known to His Church from the beginning. He had raised up a special people to be the depository of the revelation; and He had taught them by priests and prophets, by types and signs without number, and yet when redemption came how few received it, how few understood it, so that when the Saviour was actually hanging on the cross and finishing the work given Him to do, it is questionable if so much as one, even of His disciples, comprehended the design or saw the glory of His sacrifice. Man sees so little of the evil of sin, that he cannot understand why an infinite satisfaction is needed. His own heart is so narrow that he cannot embrace the

love of God in the gift of an infinite sacrifice. His own benevolence is so contracted that he distrusts the offer of an unlimited pardon, and his moral perceptions are so blunted that he is afronted rather than consoled by the promise of an Almighty Spirit to work out his deliverance from the bondage of evil. Hence when man is left to work his will upon the plan of redemption, he strikes out all its characteristic features, away goes the incarnation, and Christ is no more the co-equal Son of His Father, but the son of Joseph and Mary. Away goes the Atonement; and the cross is no longer the means of reconciling God and sinners, but the testimony to a God from the first reconciled. Away goes the offer of pardon through a Saviour's blood; and back comes the voice of the law "Do and live," and as there is now no call for a Divine Spirit to renew and sanctify, the last pillar of redemption falls amidst its other broken columns, and man's own effort and struggle return as the source of his repentance and reformation. What is Socinianism, what is Mohammedanism, what is Judaism, sinking from the level of Isaiah to the Talmud, but so many testimonies that God's ways in redemption are too high for man's fallen reason, and that it is easier to bring down heaven to earth than to lift up earth to heaven? All the opposition to evangelical religion wherewith we are surrounded, and that incessantly repeats "Give us a Christianity that is rational, give us a Christianity that meets the advancement of the age," what does it amount to but this: "Give us a Christianity without God; give us a Christianity without that element of grandeur, of mystery, of overwhelming superiority to man's thoughts and ways which compels awe and humbles pride"? We accept the demand, come from what quarter it may, as an involuntary homage to the super-human glory of the faith we stand by, as a tribute to the Christianity which still moves in her own orbit, and, though surrounded by cloud and darkness, refuses to leave her native heaven. Nor do we lose anything, but gain everything, by retaining the Gospel as its original elevation. Pointing to Him who is the Son of the Highest, we can say to the wandering children of men, "Here is God Himself come to seek and to save you!" Appealing to the matchless virtue of His sacrifice we can turn, not to the whole who need no physician, but to the sick and sore-wounded, and testify, "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." Taking our stand upon the completeness of His work and the freeness of His salvation, we can ply the most distrustful and desponding with the overtures of His love; "Let the wicked forsake his way," &c. And when the pardoned sinner feels his utter weakness, blindness, worthlessness, and helplessness, then can we, standing by the fountain of spiritual influence which Christ has opened, invite all to be washed and sanctified as well as justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.—*Cairns.*

God's Ways Above Men's.

There is the strongest reason to believe that these memorable declarations refer to God's pardoning mercy. His method of forgiveness is contrasted and exhibited as vastly superior to that of men. They find it difficult to pardon at all; they are slow to forgive an injury, &c. But God is not reluctant to forgive, &c. It may refer to the *number* and *aggravation* of offences, or to the number of *offenders*, &c. But while the passage refers primarily to pardon, and should be interpreted as having a main reference to it, it is also true of the ways of God in general.

I. Some illustrations of the glorious truth asserted.

Anything in the shape of proof might be justly deemed superfluous, if not profane, inasmuch as it is affirmed by Him who cannot lie. The purposes, plans, and actions of God are exceedingly unlike ours; they are beyond measure more noble and excellent than ours can be. Any illustrations must be vastly beneath the greatness of our theme—1. In the fact that He produces the most important results from apparently insignificant causes. 2. As He accomplishes the most glorious designs by feeble instrumentality. 3. As He accomplishes the plan of salvation on a principle totally different from what we should have determined. 4. In the sovereignty with which He bestows mercy. 5. In the varied and mysterious dealings by which He trains up His people for glory.

II. The principle on which this arrangement is founded and justified.

1. The Divine knowledge is infinitely more extensive than ours. 2. The Divine purposes are inconceivably superior to ours. 3. It is His fixed, unalterable purpose to fulfil His plans in such a way as to hide pride from man.

III. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHICH THIS VIEW OF THE DIVINE CONDUCT SUGGESTS.

1. It should awaken emotions of gratitude. 2. We should seek to have our will and our ways conformed to those of God. His will is the wisest, the kindest, and the best, and must be carried into effect: hence it is the highest wisdom of the creature to submit to His will and bow to His authority. 3. Learn to confide in His wisdom and love. 4. Anticipate the clearer light of heaven.—*George Smith, D.D.*

I. OBVIOUS REASONS FOR THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD AND OURSELVES.

God's ways and thoughts must be far above ours—

1. *Because in situation and office He is exalted far above us.* He is in heaven, we are upon earth. We occupy the footstool, He the throne. Consider the extent and duration of His kingdom. Must not the thoughts and ways of a powerful earthly monarch be far above those of one of his subjects who is employed in manufacturing pins, or cultivating a few acres of ground? Can such a subject be competent to judge of his sovereign's designs, or even to comprehend them? How far, then, must the thoughts and ways of the eternal King of kings exceed ours; and how little able are we to judge of them, further than the revelation which He has been pleased to give enables us!

2. *Because He is infinitely superior to us in knowledge and wisdom.* He must, therefore, be able to devise a thousand plans and expedients, and to bring good out of evil in numberless ways, of which we could never have conceived, and of which we are by no means competent to judge, even after they are revealed to us.

3. *Because He is perfectly benevolent and holy.* We love sin, and care for nothing but our own private interest, while His concern is for the interests of the universe. Hence His thoughts, affections, maxims, and pursuits must be entirely different from ours. Do not even the thoughts and ways of good men differ from those of the wicked? How infinitely, then, must a perfectly holy God differ from us!

II. SOME INSTANCES IN WHICH THIS DIFFERENCE MOST STRIKINGLY APPEARS.

1. In permitting the introduction and continuance of natural and moral evil. 2. In devising a way of salvation for sinners. (*α*) 3. In God's choice of means and instruments for propagating the religion of Christ. Not angels, but men; and those at the outset the humblest (1 Cor. i. 27; see p. 583). 4. In His choice of the best methods of dealing with His people, and carrying on the work of grace in their souls after it is begun.

III. SOME PRACTICAL LESSONS.

If God's ways and thoughts differ thus widely from ours, then, (1), *it is no reasonable objection against the truth of any doctrine, or the propriety of any dispensation, that it is above our comprehension and appears mysterious to us.* On the contrary, we should have reason to doubt the truth of the Scriptures, and to suspect that they are not the Word of God, if they did not contain many things which appear mysterious, and which we cannot fully comprehend. In this case, they would want one great proof of having proceeded from Him whose thoughts and ways must be infinitely above ours (H. E. I., 587; see p. 581).

2. *It must be abominable pride, impiety, folly, and presumption in us to censure them even in thought.* For an illiterate peasant to censure the conduct of his prince, with the reasons of which he is utterly unacquainted; for a child three years old to condemn the proceedings of his parent, would be nothing to this (Prov. xiii. 13). (*β*)

3. From this subject we infer *the reasonableness of the implicit faith in God which Christians exercise,* believing what they cannot fully comprehend. For this they are ridiculed. But if God's ways and thoughts are thus high above ours, ought we not implicitly to believe that all He says and does is perfectly

right? Is it not reasonable for children thus to believe their parents? for a sick man to trust in a skilful physician? for a passenger unacquainted with navigation to trust to the master of the vessel? If so, then it certainly is much more reasonable for us to trust implicitly to an infinitely wise, good, and infallible Being; and when any of His words or works appear wrong, to ascribe it to our own ignorance, blindness, or prejudice, rather than to suppose that there is anything wrong in Him. Is it not more likely that we should be wrong or mistaken, than that God should be?—*Edward Payson, D.D.: Sermons*, pp. 37–55.

(α) We should have thought that, if God intended to save sinners, He would bring them to repentance and save them at once; or at least after suffering them to endure, for a season, the bitter consequences of their own folly and disobedience. We never should have thought of providing for them a redeemer; still less should we have thought of proposing that God's only Son, the Creator and Preserver of all things, should undertake this office; and, least of all, should we have expected that He would, for this purpose, think it necessary to become man. If we had been informed that this was necessary, and if it had been left to us to fix the time and manner of His appearing, we should have concluded that He ought to come soon after the fall; to be born of illustrious parents; to make his appearance on earth in all the splendour, pomp, and glory imaginable; to overcome all opposition by a display of irresistible power; to ride through the world in triumph, conquering and to conquer. Such were the expectations of the Jews; and such, most probably, would have been ours. But never should we have thought of His being born of a virgin in abject circumstances; born in a stable; cradled in a manger, living for many years as a humble artificer; wandering, despised and rejected of men, without a place to lay His head; and finally arraigned, condemned, and crucified as a vile criminal, that He might thus expiate our sins, and by His death give life to the world.—*Payson.*

(β) An ancient writer tells us of a man who, having a house for sale, carried a brick to market to exhibit as a specimen. You smile at his folly in supposing that any purchaser would or could judge of a whole house, which he never saw, by so small a part of it. But are we not guilty of much greater folly in attempting to form an opinion of God's conduct from that little part of it which we are able to discover? In order to form a correct opinion of it, we ought to have a correct view of the whole; we ought to see the whole extent and duration of God's kingdom; to be equal with Him in wisdom, knowledge, power, and goodness; in one word, we ought to be God ourselves, for none but God is capable of judging accurately the conduct of God. Hence, whenever we attempt to judge of it, we do, in effect, set up ourselves as gods, knowing good and evil.—*Payson.*

The Errand of the Word.

lv. 10, 11. *For as the rain cometh down, &c.*

Upon what errand has God sent forth His Word? It publishes "salvation" with all its tongues. It has tidings for us of great truth; and the fault will be ours if the tidings be not also of great joy. These words of the prophet are the more powerful because they are so pleasant. They have the charm and vigour of Nature in them. Every one cares about rain, and believes in it. Every one does *not* care about truth, and believe in that. The prophet takes that in which we believe most to help our faith in that in which we believe less. And *this* is the lesson he would have sink into the heart of dull unbelieving man as the rain does into the earth, that the heavenly errands of Nature are not more sure of success than the heavenly errands of Grace; that the God of husbandry is even more the God of the husbandman; that, if water nourishes the earth, much more truth nourishes the soul; that if God's bidding is done by the winds that carry about the clouds to water the world, so also is it done—as surely, and in a higher way—by the Spirit that brings and dispenses to us the words of holy instruction and comfort.

Let us speak further—

I. Of the Word. God has His word of instruction and kindness for particular men at particular times; but His great general word of assurance is this, "*I am thy God and Saviour, and all things round thee are subject to Me: trust Me and it shall be well with thee.*" Many minds besides the mind of God have to do with the affairs of the world; but His is supreme. This

word of God, by which the world is ruled, is a word that has been uttered, that is uttered, that will be uttered. He settled at first the order of the outward heaven and earth (Ps. xxxiii. 9). He settled at first the order of the inward heaven and earth; but He made souls free, and, in His wise good will, subjected them to trial amid scenes of disorder and distress. And His word to them is one of direction, and of mercy, and of warning. It is specially a word inspiring humble spiritual trust in Himself, as the Source of all goodness, the Pardoner of iniquity. And it is a word which cheers, and leads us on day by day, with hope of comforts as we journey, and of a good end at last (ver. 12). It is also a word of promise. And he who feels the spirit of hope opening within him an entrance into a better mind, access to the wise healing truth, has not only the promise of deliverance, but real deliverance, in part, at once; and the prophetic Word shall have for him its entire fulfilment.

II. OF THE RETURNS MADE TO GOD BY HIS WORD.—1. *Of the certainty.* The great purpose of God *cannot* fail. What evidence is there in Nature of lacking strength? It shows no sign of age, palsy, or consumption. Amid all its changes and its terrors, there is no rest from action. Shall God's word, then, rest from its activity? shall His perfect Word fail? 2. *Of the manner.* The Word returns to God in many ways. It yields, by its operation, proofs that His charge against men is true. It yields fruits of patience in the souls of those who carry for God the rejected message; it produces, by the results of its rejection, the acknowledgment that it ought to have been accepted. The issue of events must be according to God's mind. So God's word is always fruitful, however unfruitful we may be. It has many manner of effects, but is never without effect. For we must all come to render to the Truth our account, though perhaps we will not come to receive from Truth our freedom and its promise. 3. *Of the measure.* God's always powerful Word returns to Him variously. Given to us for our use, and given with its certain promise, let us seek to make it profitable to ourselves, honourable to Him in an increasing measure. 4. *Of the time.* And let us remember that our time is short, and God's time long. Our time is short; we must then hear the Word and do it promptly. God's time is long; and therefore many of the returns His Word shall make Him are of necessity, and most wisely, delayed. No one of us is so mad as to set at naught Nature's power: no one of us so foolish as to expect to do any outward action, without Nature's help: and no one of us so weak and despondent but that sometimes we have both confronted and overcome Nature's hindrance. Shall we, then, set at nought the Word of God, and expect success without it? or fear to overcome, by it s aid, that world of which it is the real ruler?—*Thomas T. Lynch; Sermons for my Curates*, pp. 253–271.

These words stand in connection with the gracious invitation addressed to sinners in vers. 6, 7. The invitation is followed by inducements. The first is that the search for God will be successful—repentance will be followed by mercy. The second is drawn from the Divine magnanimity (vers. 8, 9). The third is the definiteness of the Divine intention with respect to this. This is expressed in our text.

Two ideas are contained in it—

I. THAT IT IS INTENDED TO ACCOMPLISH A DEFINITE END.

Observe the imagery of the text. Rain and snow fall from heaven. They do not return thither. They have a mission. They water the earth. They help its fruitfulness. They make it bring forth and bud. It furnishes the present beauty and plenty. It provides future beauty and plenty. For it gives seed to the sower. The seed produces the harvest. From the harvest bread is produced, which is the staff of life. Thus its mission is the sustentation of man.

The Word of God spoken and writ-

ten, the Gospel of Christ is compared to this. It is like the rain and the snow. It has a mission. Every word of God has a purpose and a destination in connection with the salvation of man. It aims to convert the individual sinner. The truth made known in the Gospel is the instrument of this. It aims to convert the world. If the conversion of individuals proceeds in a ratio exceeding that of the increase of population, the work of conversion will in due time overtake the population. And every individual converted becomes an agent for the conversion of others. Like the self-perpetuating power of nature, so in the operation of God's grace the man is converted, not only that he may enjoy his own salvation, but that he may be the means of salvation to others. An inward prompting impels him to seek that result. The Word of God in the heart is not only thus bread to the eater, but seed to the sower.

II. THAT THE END FOR WHICH IT IS GIVEN WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED.

1. *Provision is made for the publication of the Gospel.* Christ made provision when on earth by means of the few whom He had converted by His own ministry. The Gospel is in its nature diffusive. It produces an identity of feeling, principle, and aim with Christ. Love to God and man have been displaced by sin. The Gospel, when received into the heart, replaces these principles. In the introduction of these principles to the heart every provision is made for the publication of the Gospel. They animate some to preach, others to give liberally of their substance. They kindle zeal. They incite to labour, patience, diligence in this great work.

2. *The Gospel is recommended with sufficient authority.* From the constitution of our minds we cannot assent to any truth until we perceive it to be truth. Nor can we withhold our assent to anything we perceive to be truth. Therefore it is not sufficient that the Gospel be merely preached; it must also be attended with sufficient evidence of its truth. It brings various kinds of evidence,—Miracles — Prophecy—Experience,—a kind of evidence possessed by persons who have neither time nor ability to examine the other kinds. It is the power of the truth upon the heart and life.

3. *The publication of the Gospel is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit.* Holy beings would appreciate the evidence. But man is not holy, he is influenced by improper feelings and motives. Therefore the Spirit of God is poured down from on high. The means we have mentioned are channels through which the Divine influence flows. God works by means. We may resist the moral means, but the direct power of the Holy Spirit carries all before it. The husbandman sows the seed, and it is adapted to the production of the harvest. Yet influences are necessary which are beyond the command of the husbandman. There must be storm, and lightning, and sunshine. So when all suitable means are employed, there must still be the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. *The saving effect of the Gospel is distinctly predicted.* The text expressly says it shall accomplish its intended end. Study on this subject the prophecies of the Old Testament and the words of Christ. Then think of the future of the world. Has it accomplished its saving end in you?

What God has purposed He will perform. Let us then—

1. Work. Enlist in the army. Engage in the service. All do something. 2. Pray. 3. The world's glory has not reached its fulness. That will be when Christ reigns universally. The Gospel is as fresh and vigorous as ever for its appointed work.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The WORD OF GOD LIKENED TO THE RAIN AND SNOW.

Observe the analogy in the kingdoms of nature and grace, between the rain and snow, and the Divine Word. We see the resemblance—

I. In the origin of both. The rain, although naturally produced, is yet obviously the work and gift of God. He prepareth it; storeth it up; bears

it on the wings of the wind, and freely pours it upon the earth. So also the word of life is His own production. He inspired the minds of the writers, &c.

II. In the mode of communicating both, He giveth the rain — 1. At peculiar seasons—periods when its bestowment is desirable and necessary. So God gave His Word, during the various seasons of the world's history, in divers manners, and at various periods—to the fathers by the prophets, &c. Just as God exercises His infinite skill in giving rain from heaven, so also did He give the words of truth and salvation to the world. 2. Abundantly. So also He has fully revealed His will in His holy Word. Enough for all the purposes of personal piety, usefulness, &c. (2 Tim. iii. 16). 3. Discriminately. The rain is not given to all countries in like manner, as to seasons, abundance, &c. So with respect to His Word, He deposited it originally with the seed of Abraham. To them pertained His oracles. They had God's Word while the rest of the nations were in darkness. So it is even yet. As a nation we have been greatly favoured. But other countries are only now receiving in their own tongues the wonderful testimonies of God's Word. 4. Gratuitously. So also His Word is His free gift to man.

III. In the design of both. The rain is sent to make the earth fruitful, and cause it to bring forth and bud. 1. The earth, like the heart of man, without this would be unfruitful. The earth requires rain, the heart of man requires the Word of God, and is dark and barren without it. Nothing will answer as a substitute for rain, and nothing meets the exigencies of the soul but the Word of God. 2. The adaptation of both for the end contemplated. Rain softens and moistens the earth, and produces fruitfulness. The Word of God enlightens, &c. It is the instrumental means of regeneration and holiness. Wherever it is received it produces the most happy and delightful effects.

IV. In the results arising from both. The rain and snow answer the end for which they are sent. Thus God's Word shall not be ineffectual. It shall accomplish God's pleasure—produce fruit to the honour and glory of His name. 1. It shall make barren souls fruitful (1 Cor. vi. 9–11). 2. It shall increase the means of doing good. All converted persons are as seed-corn, they have been produced for the reproduction of others. 3. It shall reward the labourer (Phil. iv. 1; 1 Thess. ii. 19). 4. It shall satisfy the author. God will be eternally glorified in the achievements of His Word. It will attain all God intended and expected from it.

Application: Do we bear fruit to the glory of God's grace?—*J. Burns, LL.D.: Sketches on Metaphors*, &c., pp. 259–263.

In these words Isaiah means to trace a resemblance between these natural and spiritual influences—

I. IN THEIR DIVINE ORIGIN. (See p. 589.)

II. IN THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR PRODUCE. What would this earth be without the rain and snow from heaven? What would this world be without the Gospel? But both come from God, and bring forth provision for both present and future needs, there is bread for the eater and seed for the sower. The Christian enjoys the blessings of the Gospel himself, and with delight conveys them to others.

III. IN THEIR MODE OF OPERATION In both cases this is—1. Gradual. 2. Mysterious. 3. According to the soil. 4. In accordance with human means and exertions.

IV. IN THE CERTAINTY OF THEIR SUCCESS. This seems to be Isaiah's principal, though not his only aim. Who will dare to say that the rain falls anywhere to no purpose? Certainly the Gospel is never preached in vain. 1. Where it does not accomplish God's designs of mercy, it leaves sinners without excuse in the day of judgment. 2. Where it does not save, it civilises; where it does not sanctify, it restrains. The social influences of a faithful minister can scarcely be

over-rated. 3. Where the highest results are produced, they are often hidden. Not now, but "the day of Christ" is the appointed season for ministerial rejoicing (Phil. ii. 16).

CONCLUSION.—1. No man can listen to the preaching of the Gospel without being influenced for good or for evil (H. E. I., 2439–2442). 2. In this subject there is encouragement for God's servants. Ministers should read this text whenever they are about to enter the pulpit.—*William Jay: The British Pulpit*, vol. iii., pp. 409–422.

THE CHEERFUL COURSE OF THE GODLY.

lv. 12. *Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace, &c.*

There is resolution and effort on our part, and help and guidance on God's part. We "go out" and we are "led." We must not forget either side of the truth. The farmer works in harmony with the rains and sunshine; the sailor in harmony with the winds and the sea. These two things, "going out" and "joy," do not naturally agree. Going out is naturally more or less painful. Even although it is to make your position better, there is yet pain in leaving. But God says to the believer: "These two incompatible things will meet in your case; nay, the one shall be the occasion of the other." The text also speaks of leading forth, and says of it that it shall be "with peace." The Christian's course is like a stream bounding forth from its native darkness with joy, and then gradually acquiring the tranquil flow of the broad river in the plain. Some applications—

I. **In conversion**, the soul goes out with joy and is led forth with peace. Conversion is the soul's first and great "going out." That is the essential idea of conversion. It is not so many prayers and tears and resolutions. It is turning our back on the old life of sin and selfishness, and coming out into the light of God, as really as the emigrant leaves one country and goes to another. This coming out is a joyful thing. The Israelites celebrated their leaving of Egypt by a feast; and surely the coming out of the soul from darkness to light, from condemnation to life, may well be the signal of joy. And in the case of the soul delivered from death there is the peaceful *leading*, as well as the joyful departure. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace," &c.

II. **In the varied changes of life**, the Christian goes out with joy and is led forth with peace. If we are the people of God, if we meet all changes in a spirit of faith and obedience, we may go forth with joy. Let us meet all our changes clinging to God's guidance, taking a firmer hold of God as the scenes get stranger and stranger, as a child takes a firmer hold of his father the further he is from home.

III. **At death** the believer goes out with joy, and is led forth with peace. He may have looked forward to it with misgiving, with something like dismay. But at midnight, when the cry comes, he rejoices greatly because he hears the Bridegroom's voice. Like a tired labourer, he goes thankfully home, like a welcome and expectant guest, he goes rejoicing to the banquet.—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. p. 122.

THE PERPETUAL MIRACLE.

lv. 13. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, &c.*

I. MIRACLES PROMISED IN THE CHURCH OF GOD. 1. The promise takes different shapes. Savage beasts shall lose their nature and become harmless and tractable (ch. xi. 6, &c.). In sandy wastes streams of water shall flow till they become green with foliage and gay with flowers (ch. xxxv. 1, 2, 7). Here, out of the ground which produced only thorns and briers, shall grow stately trees. 2. Such miracles to be looked for by believers. They

have in them Christ who came to give life (ch. x. 10), the Spirit of life (Rom. viii. 2), and the word of life (Phil. ii. 16), which is quick, *i.e.*, living and powerful (Heb. iv. 12). How natural, then, that death, barrenness, and the curse, should disappear where such forces are at work (α).

II. FALSE MIRACLES CLAIMED BY CORRUPT CHURCHES. 1. The Church of Rome and the Greek Church both profess that miracles are continually being wrought in their communion. 2. Reasons for disbelieving such miracles: (α) They generally happen in obscure localities. (β) Do not convince unbelievers. (γ) Become more uncertain the more they are inquired into. (δ) Tend to support the idolatrous worship of saints.

III. THE TRUE MIRACLES WROUGHT IN THE TRUE CHURCH, *i.e.*, the Church of such as love Christ, wherever they are found. 1. These consist in the conversion of sinners, and are spoken of in the New Testament as a second birth, &c. (1 John iii. 2; Acts xxvi. 18; Eph. ii. 5; 2 Cor. v. 17; Eph. ii. 8; Eph. i. 19, 20). 2. All conversion is from God and supernatural, but this most clearly seen when great sinners converted suddenly.

LEARN—1. Never to despair of any sinners, however hardened. 2. To think it natural that mighty deeds should be wrought by a mighty God.—*C. S. Carey: The Class and the Desk*, vol. ii. p. 189.

(α) Now, although neither vines nor figtrees have spines or prickles, it must be confessed that these pungent appendages are found on some plants which are neither thorns nor thistles. For what is a prickle? It is the elongated cell which to many a stem gives its velvet, and to the moss-rose its fragrant fretwork,—it is the same pile hardened and sharpened into a piercing needle. And what is a thorn? In the morphology of a plant it is well known to be an abortive bud. If it had come on and come out, it would in due time have yielded its blossom and its fruit, and might have strengthened into a goodly bough; but, eventuating in nothing more than a cruel, useless spike, it is the very symbol of ill-trained or misdirected energy.

But here is something beautiful. In many cases it is found that thorns yield to culture. By taking in the wild plant and giving it kind treatment the skilful gardener tames and transforms it, till in the process of years the trenchant thorn is replaced by a golden apple or a rosy flower. And greater wonders are effected in God's husbandry. In nature some plants have baffled horticulture; but if you watch, pray, and really strive, there is nothing impossible to faith and prayer. Fix on your besetting sin, and fight against it; and as in dependence upon the Heavenly Husbandman you strive and pray, the Spirit poured forth from on high will fulfil in you the promise of our text.—*James Hamilton, D.D.*

Vers. 12, 13. Figurative language, yet the meaning obvious.

I. The world-wide diffusion of the Gospel. II. The Gospel is redolent with blessings, and only blessings to man. III. The glory of Christ is hereby secured, much more than in any other way.—*A. M'Auslane, D.D.*

THE PRESCRIBED METHOD OF WAITING FOR GOD'S SALVATION.

lvi. 1, 2. *Thus saith the Lord, keep ye judgment, &c.*

["The doctrine of the passage is simply this, that they who enjoy extraordinary privileges, or expect extraordinary favours, are under corresponding obligations to do the will of God; and, moreover, that the nearer the manifestation of God's mercy, whether in time or in eternity, the louder the call to righteousness of life."—*Alexander.*]

But a special and useful application of the passage may be made, viz., to answer the question, "*How shall we account for the fact that, of those who cease to neglect religion, and take some pains to acquaint themselves with God and to be at peace with Him, many are very slow in attaining to any establishment of mind, and continue long at a distance from the peace they seek?*"

Let seekers after this Divine peace observe—

I. WHAT EVERY HEARER OF THE GOSPEL OUGHT IMMEDIATELY TO DO. The teaching of our text on this point is most simple and most important.

1. Every hearer of the Gospel who would enjoy the peace which it offers

must immediately abstain from all known sin. He must not think that using the language of humiliation, and calling himself a miserable sinner, will be of any benefit to him while the sin which he confesses is not forsaken. Many go on for years complaining of their sins, yet never come to the point of separation from them, and for this very reason remain strangers to true peace (H. E. I., 4269–4273).

2. *He must also immediately set himself to do all the good he can.* "Keep ye judgment, and do justice." In *all* his dealings with his fellow-men, he must strictly follow the golden rule (Matt. vii. 12).

3. *He must be diligent in the use of the means of grace, particularly in his observance of the Sabbath Day.* Many who have been awakened to some concern for their souls, and for a time promised fair to attain the blessing of peace with God, have lost it by their inconstancy to Sabbath duties. Thus they have grieved the Spirit of God, and cut themselves off from the enjoyment of His peace.

All this is absolutely necessary, yet it is but preparatory to receiving the Gospel; *it is preparing the way of the Lord.* It is not a goodness in which any man should rest, satisfied with his attainments. Suppose all this done, is he to think that he is now a good man, and must be in the favour of God? The man who imagines this goes about to establish his own righteousness, and has no regard to the salvation of God and the righteousness of God. He becomes his own saviour, frustrates the grace of God, and makes Christ to have died in vain. The motive on account of which any action is done determines its value (P. D. 2511). It does so here. The self-righteous Pharisee abstains from outward evil, does many good works, offers many prayers, performs many religious acts; the man who obeys the Gospel does the same—*but* the Pharisee does these things that he may be saved *without* Christ; the obedient disciple does them *in his way* to Christ. The Pharisee does them, and though he may make use of the name of Christ, looks to *them* for his acceptance with God; the penitent does them, but does not look to them at all—as a *penitent* he looks for the salvation of God, that it may come unto him; and for the righteousness of God, that it may be revealed in his heart. And it shall be.

II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF ATTENDING TO THE CHARGE OF THE TEXT.

He may not be sensible of his own blessedness. There are many things which may cause him not to be so. The real improvement which has taken place in his character is far from being likely to improve him in his own good opinion. As he approaches nearer to the performance of the precepts of the law, he discerns more its vast extent and spirituality, and how far he is from conformity to it; he so feels the evils of his heart that he is sometimes tempted to fear that the salvation of God cannot be extended to him. Thus he seems *not* to be blessed; but he *is* blessed. Our text declares him so, and the Scripture cannot be broken. Yea, our Saviour has pronounced him blessed (Matt. v. 3).

Nothing can be more clear than that the man who, when he hears of God's salvation, turns from iniquity and does good, while he waits and looks for that salvation, is in the way to obtain it. He will obtain it *assuredly;* it may be, speedily; but it is a gift, and He who gives it keeps the time and the manner of it in His own hands. But when there is a due preparation for receiving it on man's part, there will be no long delay in conferring it on God's (Ch. lvi. 1). If the Lord hides Himself, and continues long absent from the seeking soul, it is probably because there is something in the state of the man's mind, and in the course of his conduct, which makes him not a fit recipient of the Divine favour (H. E. I., 2338).

In receiving this salvation, the *believer* looks to nothing but the grace and gift of God.

CONCLUSION.—1. Cautions for those who are seeking the salvation of God. (1.) *Do not neglect the direction of the*

text. You know that salvation is of grace; that it is received simply by faith; that it does not depend on a man's worthiness; and that therefore to delay going to Christ till he has made himself more fit and worthy, is vain and self-righteous. All this is true. But if your knowledge of it leads you to omit *one* act of known duty, or to commit *one* sin, you show that you know nothing as you ought to know. It is true that you are not exhorted to stay from believing in Christ till you have made yourself better; you are invited to come as you are; *but*, in making your way to Christ and to His peace, be the time longer or shorter, you are bound, from the first moment you enter upon it, to keep your hand from doing any evil, and also to do good. You are to wait upon God in the way of His commandments. (2.) *Do not abuse the direction of the text.* You cannot attend to it too diligently, too exactly. But you may put it in a wrong place. You may be trying to obtain peace to your conscience *by* your honesty, &c. This would be to pervert the precept of our text to a use exactly contrary to its intention. You would not be waiting and looking for God's righteousness at all; you would be going about to establish your own (Rom. x. 2, 3).

2. A word of admonition to established Christians. As the first communication of peace to the new convert is given according to his conscientious diligence in waiting for it in the way of obedience; so *your* comforts will be very much proportioned to your watchfulness, humility, and fruitfulness in good works. You complain, perhaps, that it is not with you as in former days; that you have not the comfort which you once enjoyed. But may there not be a cause? Have you not declined from that seriousness of spirit and holy walking with God, in which you began your religious course? Return to Christ in *duty*, and He will return to you in *kindness* (John xiv. 21; H. E. I., 350).—*John Fawcett, A.M.: Familiar Discourses*, pp. 20–38.

I. *Gospel privilege.* Salvation in Christ. Near at hand. Revealed to faith. Secured in the righteousness of God. II. *Gospel law.* Moral duties—"judgment;" "justice." Religious duties—keeping the Sabbath; renunciation of all sin, &c. III. *Gospel happiness.* "Blessed," &c. Divine approbation. Inward peace. Confident hope of a better life.—*Dr. Lyth.*

The Sabbath.

lvi. 2. *Blessed is the man that doeth this . . . that keepeth the Sabbath, &c.* (α)

The Lord had just spoken in general terms (ver. 1), and now He speaks more particularly. When God instituted the Sabbath He pronounced a particular blessing upon it (Gen. ii. 3). In the text, and elsewhere, man's happiness is connected with its due observance. What God hath joined together let no man attempt to put asunder. Whatever "pollutes" the holy character of the day destroys the blessing that God designed to attach to it.

I. The obligation of the Sabbath. Many act as if they did not believe the ordinance of the Sabbath to be binding. The various theories which denude the Sabbath of its high authority as a positive and permanent institution of the living God. "If the day be not 'sanctified' by God Himself, it is vain to talk of 'the everlasting necessities of human nature,' or of 'civil and ecclesiastical authority,' or of 'beneficial purposes'; it will soon cease to exert any influence on the hearts and consciences of men, and will be hailed merely as a day of recreation and amusement." By what arguments, then, do we prove that the Sabbath is of universal and perpetual obligation? By the fact that it was—

1. *Instituted at the Creation* (Gen. ii. 2, 3). 2. *Established by an express command.* Incorporated with the moral

law (Ex. xxxiv. 1). That law is our law, as well as the law of the Jews (Matt. v. 17, 18; Rom. iii. 31); and is universally binding, because unrepealed. 3. *By the obvious universality of the design for which it was instituted.* It was given as—(1.) A memorial of creation, and it is as much the duty of Christians to retain a devout remembrance of the power, &c., of the great Creator as it was of the Jewish Church. (2.) A season of rest needed as much as ever. (3.) A day of blessing and sanctity, and from no people would God withhold so great a boon, &c. 4. *Confirmed by the teaching and practice of our Lord and His Apostles.* It has been observed by the Church of Christ in general. Put together these circumstances, and can you doubt that the observance of the Sabbath is a religious obligation?

II. THE POLLUTION OF THE SABBATH. The Sabbath is polluted—

1. *When it is spent in mere idleness.* Action in everything holy and heavenly should mark its consecrated hours. 2. *When it is devoted to worldly amusement.* 3. *By all labour which may not fairly come under the description of works of necessity and mercy.*

III. THE PROPER MODE OF ITS OBSERVANCE.

1. *Everything that would hinder its spiritual observance must be laid aside.* All secular business and toil. Except the works of necessity and mercy, there should be one unbroken and universal repose (Ex. xx. 8–11; Deut. v. 14, &c.). Frivolities and amusements; conversation upon subjects that are unconnected with and opposed to spirituality of thought; unnecessary journeying, visiting, strolling, luxury, &c. (ch. lviii. 13, and others). 2. *Whatever would promote the highest interests of our being must be observed.* Public worship; relative and private duties of religion, &c.

IV. THE ADVANTAGES OF KEEPING THE SABBATH.

1. *Temporal.* It is the more needful to dwell on these because some persuade themselves that worldly gain is promoted by secularising the Lord's Day. (1.) The toils of life are for awhile suspended. The constitution of our nature requires a weekly respite from toil and solicitude, &c. (2.) The mind and body are invigorated by fresh exertion. Not so by Sunday excursions, &c. (3.) The reward of prosperity is evidently attached to it. The converse of this is no less painfully common and true; Sabbath-breaking is the starting-point of that course which leads on to crime, disgrace, and ruin.

2. *Spiritual.* (1.) Finished redemption is then celebrated. How glad and glorious are the tidings to those that are conscious of their guilt! (2.) The means of grace are enjoyed. They are merciful appointments of "the God of all grace." The Sabbath provides and guards these means, which act as a counterpoise to the excessive activity and competition which distinguish our country and our times. St. John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," and God's people are amply replenished with that Spirit's grace on this day of blessing. (3.) The heavenly rest is anticipated. We are but sojourners on earth, &c. The earthly Sabbath affords the best picture and foretaste of the heavenly!

CONCLUSION.—Are you among the "blessed" ones who keep the Sabbath from polluting it? Then make every exertion to prevent its violation, &c. Or, do you find the Sabbath a weariness? Then your heart is not right, or it would be a delight, and therefore you are wholly unfit for the eternal Sabbath of Heaven. "Ye must be born again."—*A. Tucker.*

(a) See Outlines on ch. lviii. 13, 14.

I. The principles of true religion—practical, experimental, holy. II. The blessedness of it. Divine approbation; inward peace; blessing; confident hope of a better life.—*Dr. Lyth.*

JOINED TO THE LORD.

lvi. 3, 6. *The sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord.*

The end of all worship is union with God. To this most glorious issue all the revelations of Scripture converge. It is the end of all teaching, and the seal of all perfection. Our Lord's prayer for His people makes this the goal of Christian aspiration (John xvii. 21). But union with God is, like all other relations to the Supreme, attained only in and through the Mediator (John xvii. 3). It is the realisation of the one object of the redeeming economy. It has undoubtedly been the watchword of some of the sublimest systems of ethics based on erroneous doctrine. Buddhism and Pantheistic mysticism are instances.

Let us endeavour to realise the import and the power of this remarkable expression, "joined to the Lord," which is the exponent and formula of vital truths and glorious privileges (1 Cor. vi. 17).

I. *The* **nature** *of this alliance.* What does it imply?—

1. *The conviction of moral estrangement.* Instead of that intimate union which man originally enjoyed, there is a wide and extended breach, &c. The manifold and painful evidences—alienation from God both in affection and action, &c. (Rom. viii. 7, and others). Such is our deplorable state previous to the period when we join ourselves to the Lord. 2. *The full approval of God's service.* We never devote ourselves to those whose service we have a decided objection to; on the contrary we carefully avoid it. But naturally we are opposed to God's righteous rule and service, hence the necessity of regeneration, that we may be inspired with a love of holiness, &c. External reformation will not suffice, for the heart will retain its original aversion to the Divine government and service. Only by regeneration does our judgment approve, and our will consent to the Lord's service as pre-eminently righteous, &c. Then only do we "choose the things that please Him" (ver. 4). 3. *The surrender of ourselves to His service* (ver. 6). Simple approval and desire, though necessary, are not sufficient, they never cemented firm, durable alliance. There must be the actual yielding of ourselves to God in harmony with His gracious demands. This surrender must be unreserved, voluntary, constant. Prompted by obvious and powerful reasons. It is both right and reasonable, pleasant and profitable, &c. (1 Tim. iv. 8, and others). 4. *Spiritual union and oneness with Him.* Not a mere figure of speech, but the greatest reality in human experience. New Testament illustrations. Even these figures can only faintly set it forth. The union is most intimate. One Spirit lives and moves, actuates and guides, both in the Head and members (1 Cor. vi. 17; Heb. ii. 11). We become one with God in thought and feeling and will. Are you "joined to the Lord"? For it is more than mere nominal Christianity, or profession of religion—it is spiritual and gracious. You may be joined to His Church and people, and yet not savingly joined to Him. Examine yourselves, and rest not until you have satisfactory evidence. But what are—

II. *The* **evidences** *of this alliance.* We *may* know (John xiv. 20; 1 John v. 20). The principal evidences are—1. *Trust in Christ alone for salvation.* Faith is a self-conscious act, &c. 2. *Deliverance from condemnation* (Rom. viii. 1). From whence can condemnation come? (Rom. viii. 34). 3. *Moral Regeneration* (2 Cor. v. 17; Gal. vi. 15). The new nature asserts its power, and refuses to be the slave of Satan, &c. Renewing grace creates a new world in the soul. We become conformed to Christ. 4. *The inward testimony of the Holy Ghost* (1 John iii. 24; iv. 13). 5. *Fruitfulness in good works.* This is the design and tendency of this alliance (John xv. 4, 5, 8; Eph. ii. 10). Not the fair leaves of profession, but the fragrant and substantial fruits of

righteousness (Phil. i. 11)—keeping "judgment," doing "justice," &c. (vers. 1, 6; 1 John ii. 3, 5; iii. 24).

III. *The* privileges *of this alliance.* If we are joined to the Lord we have —1. *Admittance to the fellowship and blessing of His Church* (vers. 5, 7). Regarded as His true worshippers. Prayers and praises—"spiritual sacrifices," accepted. The highest possible honours conferred—Divine favour and friendship, &c. (2 Cor. v. 21, and others). These honours impart true happiness, and are more valuable than any earthly advantage, because eternal and unchangeable (ver. 5). 2. *His life* (Gal. ii. 20; Col. iii. 4). Our spiritual life flows from Him. We dwell in Him and He in us. Our life from first to last is life in Christ. 3. *His position* (Eph. ii. 5, 6). 4. *His power, wisdom,* &c. We have an interest in all that He is, and has (Phil. iv. 13, and others). 5. *His sympathy.* Human, at best, is deficient. Sympathy between the head and members of the body. True of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 26, 27; Eph. v. 30; Acts ix. 4). 6. *Answers to prayer* (John xiv. 13; xv. 7; xvi. 23; 1 John iii. 22). 7. *Confidence at His coming* (1 John ii. 28; Col. i. 24). Then we shall participate in His glory! What wealth of privilege is ours. Language cannot express such glory as this. Who could have conceived that such blessedness could have been ours? Are we realising these privileges? Are we taking God at His word respecting them, &c.? If our privileges are great, great too are our responsibilities. Walk worthy of this relation, &c.

CONCLUSION.—1. This alliance is *effected* by cordially receiving God's "salvation" as now "come," and unhesitatingly accepting His "righteousness" as now "revealed" in Christ (ver. 1). There need be no doubt or hesitation in appropriating them as your own (2 Cor. vi. 2; Rom iii. 22; ii. 28, 29; Gal. iii. 28, 29; Phil. iii. 3). "Yield yourselves unto God" through Christ, and the alliance is formed; so simple, and yet so real is the transaction. Then you may testify with humble but assured confidence (Sol. Song ii. 16). 2. This alliance is *maintained* by faith (Gal. ii. 20; Eph. iii. 17; Col. ii. 6, 7).—*A. Tucker.*

CHARACTERISTICS AND PRIVILEGES OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

lvi. 4–7. *For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My Sabbaths, &c.*

The pride of ancestry, and boast of ceremonial exclusiveness, and glorying in the flesh, the Lord, by His prophet, looking forward to gospel days, now abolishes, and marks out the true distinctions of His people to be that which is moral and spiritual, to the exclusion of all bodily defects or national peculiarities. Observe—

I. THE MARKS AND DISTINCTIONS OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

1. *Keeping the Sabbath.* The day emphatically is the Lord's, reminding us at once of creation and of redemption (Eph. xx. 11; Deut. v. 15). One day in seven is, therefore, justly dedicated to God as an acknowledgment that He is at once Creator and Redeemer. Besides, the Sabbath-day is subservient to the highest interests of man as a moral and immortal being, &c.

2. *Choosing the things that please Him.* The things that please God are the things that are agreeable to His revealed will (Micah vi. 8). And to follow out this requirement we must "choose," we must exercise an act of the will, and the gracious promise is (Ps. cx. 3); and, once thus made willing, having our hearts enlarged, we run in the way of God's commandments (Ps. cxix. 32; Rom. xii. 2; John iv. 34). Implies the obeying of God's will, and submission to it; active, willing obedience, and patient endurance under the events of providence, "as seeing Him who is invisible." This gracious disposition diffuses a noble bearing and dignity over all the conduct and trials of the believer (Ps. xxix. 2; Jer. ix. 24).

3. *Taking hold of His covenant.* The covenant here spoken of has, no doubt, an allusion to the covenant that God made with the Jews, when He brought them out of the land of Egypt, and in that sense embodies the doctrines and precepts of the revealed will of God, along with the promises of God on the one hand, and the obligations of those who become parties to the covenant on the other hand; but in the full sense of the words, in their prophetic announcement, the reference undoubtedly is to that covenant of grace, that is now made known to all (Jer. xxxi. 31–34). To "take hold," therefore, "of the covenant," is to apprehend its truths, and conform to its requirements; or, to "hold it fast" is to maintain those truths, and exhibit an obedience to those requirements in a consistent life of persevering holiness. Neither profession, outward distinction, or legal ceremony is

enough; there must be reality, inward spirituality, and "holiness unto the Lord" (Ezek. xxx. 27; Jer. l. 4, 5; Ps. ciii. 17, 18).

4. *Being joined to Him to serve Him*, or minister to Him (Exod. xxx. 20; xxxv. 19; 1 Chron. xvi. 37; Rev. i. 6; Jer. l. 5; Isa. xliv. 5; 1 Cor. vi. 17; John xv. 14). The very essence of this "joining," this adherence or union, is spiritual and gracious. (See outline, "Joined to the Lord," p. 596.)

5. *Loving His name.* "The name of the Lord" is a very comprehensive expression; it includes everything by which God makes Himself known,—His attributes, character, creation, providence, word, ordinances (Exod. xxxiv. 5–7; Ps. xxxiv. 3; v. 11). It is to have the enmity of the carnal mind slain, &c. (Rom. viii. 7; Eph. ii. 16; Isa. lvii. 19; Gal. v. 6; vi. 15; 1 Cor. vii. 19).

6. *Serving Him.* "To be His servants." An active, willing obedience must inevitably follow. The language here again is similar to that which was applied to the Levites, in reference to their duties in the tabernacle and the temple (Num. iv. 47; xviii. 6; viii. 11; Lev. xxv. 55; Ps. lxxii. 11; ii. 11; Tit. ii. 11, 12).

II. THE GRACIOUS AND GLORIOUS PRIVILEGES OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

1. *Incorporation with His Church*—admittance to the fellowship and privileges of His people. The tabernacle was placed on Mount Zion, the temple was built on Mount Moriah; the expression "My holy mountain" is, therefore, by a figure of speech, applied to the spiritual Church of the true God (Isa. ii. 2). The language is figurative, taken from the circumstances and customs in the midst of which the prophet and his fellow-countrymen were then placed; but such in its sum and substance is the meaning of this prophecy. The characters described were excluded of the law (Deut. xxiii. 1–3). But now, looking forward to a nobler and more advanced economy, even that under which we live, those very persons are not only admitted into "the Lord's house," and "within the very walls" of His temple; but they are promised "a place and a name there;"—the very "place" where the priests used to worship (Zech. iii. 7; Ezek. xxi. 19); the very "name" that the priests were wont to bear are made theirs (Rev. i. 6; John i. 12). That "place" and that "name" are better than those of sons and of daughters. The true Christian is possessed of a title and a pedigree before which the most ancient ancestry of earth declines into insignificance (John i. 12, 13; Gal. iv. 6; Rom. viii. 16, 17; I Pet. i. 23–25). These privileges and honours are *everlasting*. There is on the part of some an ardent love of fame—the strong desire of worldly immortality. God's people may, through grace, obtain the highest honours and happiness beyond the grave. "The good alone are great." The "name," in the Hebrew language, is used to denote the character and condition of a person: "As his name is, so is he" (1 Sam. xxv. 25). The honour and happiness of God's people, as to the body and as to the soul, in time and throughout eternity, shall be fixed and permanent. He gives them some prelude of this by granting them honour and happiness here on earth (John xiv. 27; Rev. ii. 17). And most largely on the separation of the soul from the body (Phil. i. 21–23; 1 Cor. ii. 9; 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8; Rev. iii. 21); and on the body being raised up incorruptible from the grave (1 Cor. xv. 42–44; Phil. iii. 20, 21; 2 Cor. iii. 18); and still grander when the ransomed soul and glorified body shall have been united together, to live for ever in heaven. This is the native sequel of a holy life, of one who has kept the Lord's Sabbaths, &c. (ver. 4). But the blessing is a reward through grace, "I will *give* them," &c. There shall be different degrees of glory among the saints in heaven; but each inhabitant, according to his capacity, will be perfectly happy (1 Cor. xv. 41, 42; Dan. xii. 3; 1 John iii. 3).

2. *Joy in the sanctuary* (ver. 7). Great was the joy of the Jew when he went up to "Zion, the city of solemnities" (Isa. xxxiii. 20), and was introduced to the pure worship and high festivals of the God of his fathers (Ps. cxxii. 1, 2, 6; xlii. 1, 2). And if such was the experience of a pious Hebrew in connection with the ordinances of "a worldly sanctuary," what must the enjoyment of a Gentile believer be under "the ministration of the Spirit," in the midst of "a glory that excelleth" (2 Cor. iii. 8, 10). Consider the happiness and joy of God's people, amidst the ordinances and privileges, and gracious manifestations, that are realised in the sanctuary. The communion of saints mellows the soul, and draws forth the hidden graces of the Spirit.

3. *Acceptance of their spiritual worship* (ver. 7). There can be no doubt that under those names we have things spiritual and eternal shadowed forth. The splendid ceremonial of the law tells of the spirituality of the Gospel. The priesthood has become common to all believers, even whilst the office of "pastors and teachers" remains intact (Eph. iv. 11). Prayers and thanksgivings, &c., are in the place of "burnt-offerings" and "sacrifices" (Ps. iv. 5; li. 15–19; Hos. xiv. 2; Mal. i. 11; Heb. xiii. 15, 16; 1 Pet. ii. 5; Rev. viii. 3). "For mine house shall be an house of prayer for all nations"—a place of spiritual worship, where His name is honoured and invoked, and in which the confessions, and petitions, and thanksgivings of His suppliants are presented to Him (Exod. xx. 24; John iv. 21–24; Isa. ii. 2–4).—*John Gemmel, M.A.: The Gospel in Isaiah*, pp. 177–228.

I. The *nature* of Gospel privilege. A place in God's house. A name among His children. A share in His covenant.

II. The *extent* of Gospel privilege.

It reaches all, without distinction or limitation.

III. The *conditions* of Gospel privilege. That we join ourselves to the Lord; keep His Sabbaths; choose the things that please Him; and take hold of His covenant, &c.—*Dr. Lyth.*

The Universal Inclusiveness of the Christian Dispensation.

lvi. 6, 7. *Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, &c.*

This passage relates to the Gospel period. The prophet has described the suffering and glory of Christ; the security of the Gospel Church; the salvation provided; the invitation to its free enjoyment; its wide success. The present chapter is a still more explicit exposition of its universal aspect. All peoples would be equally admitted to the privileges and advantages of the Gospel. This is the main idea of the text. The language and imagery are Jewish; the conception is Christian. The text sets forth the universal inclusiveness of the Christian dispensation—

I. In relation to religious character.

It is not said that the privileges of the Gospel will be conferred on all mankind without regard to character. The death of Christ has provided the salvation. But the proclamation of mercy it authorises is not the statement of the actual pardon of all mankind. It is a proclamation of the King's readiness to pardon; an invitation to partake of a feast on compliance with the conditions of the invitation. Man is to take hold of God's covenant and join himself to the Lord. Turning from sin and believing in the Saviour, he is to accept the salvation. All marks of this are not indicated here; but there are—

1. *Love to the Divine person.* The Gospel is a religion of love. In Christ the Divine character is presented in such lights as win the believer's love. Nor is it merely love to abstract principles, doctrines, truths. It includes this; but while comprehending this, it takes the personal form. He loves God: God as expressed to him in the person of Christ.

2. *Devotion to the Divine service.* Love expresses itself in obedience to the Divine commands. It is the test he has imposed. Christians recognise the supreme right of Christ to govern their lives. Their new nature makes it a willing service. Not the service of the slave, nor even of the hireling, but of the child. All the soldiers in Christ's army are volunteers; nor does he acknowledge enforced and unwilling service as rendered to him at all.

3. *Observance of Divine ordinances.* The Sabbath has been observed from the beginning, &c.

Inclusion in the Gospel covenant is open to all who are thus willing to place themselves in spiritual connection with Christ.

II. In relation to religious worship.

"For mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." There is something exceedingly interesting and attractive in the idea of a common centre of religious worship for man. The temple was the centre for the Jewish people. They made it more or less exclusive. Contrary to the law (Num. xv. 14–16). But under the Christian dispensation there must be no exclusion. The Christian sanctuary, as representing the dispensation, must be open to all comers. The attitude of those who belong to it, should be that of those who are prepared to give a kindly welcome to the stranger, and a kindly invitation to those who are wandering without a spiritual home.

While the intercourse between God and His children must, for the most part, be sacredly private, public worship is a necessity. On the part of the worshippers it becomes a mutual encouragement and strength, as well as an open testimony for God to the world. It is a commanded duty, which has been practised by godly people in all periods. It is the subject of many

special promises. It exerts a gracious influence on such as engage in it; soothing the perturbed spirit, comforting the troubled heart, elevating the soul too apt to be lowered by the world's influence, and purifying the heart by communion with the Holy One. Let all such as desire to come into God's covenant regard His house as their home. It is the one place in the world where all of every race, every rank, every peculiarity of personal characteristic may meet on equal terms and with equal rights.

III. IN RELATION TO RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES.

There is no distinction in the measure of spiritual blessedness awarded; no classes of inner and outer court worshippers. There is no distinction but such as persons make for themselves. Let any one join himself to the Lord and thus put himself in the requisite spiritual position, and then all the blessedness of the Gospel is open to him.

1. *Church communion.* The sacred mountain of Moriah, the scene of so many exhibitions of God's grace, shall become the house of the stranger. Why do so many who love the Saviour under-estimate the fellowship of His saints?

2. *Spiritual enjoyment.* Religion not dull and melancholy. It is a pure joy congenial to the sanctified soul.

3. *Divine acceptance.* As the sacrifice of the spotless lamb, so the sacrifices of praise and prayer.

Let us all come into the Divine covenant. Value its privileges. Diffuse its blessings.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The text—

I. Holds out universal encouragement to man.

1. By the transfer of the priesthood from Aaron to Christ. 2. By the change of sacrifice. From the blood of bulls and of goats to the precious blood of the Son of God. 3. By the removal of place. From Jerusalem to the temple of the universe. 4. By a change of worship From ritual to spiritual. What an encouraging prospect (Eph. ii. 11, &c.).

II. Inculcates universal piety.

Piety in heart and practice. The duties here enumerated may be divided into three classes. 1. Those which relate to Christ, expressed by taking hold of His covenant—accepting—agreeing to it. 2. Those which relate to God as the Governor of the world. His servants—walk by His laws—keep His Sabbaths. 3. Those which relate to the Church.

III. Promises universal happiness.

1. Access to heaven. There was near approach to God, through the high priest, under the law. Yet more especially is this the case through Christ, the great High Priest of our profession. 2. Joyfulness in His service. In the use of every Divine ordinance they shall find rich satisfactions and delights (ch. xii. 3). Praise shall rejoice their spirits. In psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs they make melody in their hearts unto the Lord. Prayer opens heaven in the exhaustlessness of its store, and satisfies them with good. Holy thoughts in conversing with the Supreme. Such meditation of God is sweet. 3. The Divine acceptance of their religious engagements.

Application.—What encouragement to all men to worship God, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth! But how do you really view the Gospel? Are you seeking to realise these high privileges, or are you only making a profession of religion? Ponder these weighty matters. Take hold of the covenant of the Redeemer, &c.—*Richard Watson: Sermons and Outlines*, pp. 305–307.

In the Gospel we behold a beautiful intermixture of doctrine, promise, and precept, by means of which the performance of evangelical worship is rendered at once a reasonable and delightful service. As sinners, we ought not to have been surprised if we had had fewer promises to render the worship of God inviting; but in the Gospel every means is employed to render devotional exercises a welcome relief to the mind; we are

drawn, not driven; we are taught to consider the sanctuary of religion not only as a place of refuge, but as a place of rest; and instead of being compelled to lay hold of the horns of the altar as a last resource, the only hiding-place from the avenger of blood, we are taught to view it under the endearing character of the house of our Father, and consequently as our proper and our peaceful home. Strangers as we have been to God, and enemies to Him by wicked works, it might have been thought a great privilege if we were barely tolerated in our approaches to Him, if our sacrifices were received without disdain; but instead of this, we are welcomed into the presence of the great King, &c. "Even I will bring them," &c.

This promise has a direct reference to Gospel times, and the Jews interpret it of the time when Messiah, the Son of David, should come. There can be no doubt of this, if it is read in connection with the preceding chapter. The special privileges of the Jewish Church were for the most part confined to the members of one family, one nation, one kindred, but the blessings of the Gospel Church are free and unconfined. As the times of the Gospel drew nigh, there was a considerable softening given to the rugged features of the former dispensation—promises were given to the Gentile as well as to the Jew, and provision was made for the stranger within their gates, as well as for the children of Abraham themselves, &c. But it was reserved for the Gospel to abolish these distinctions altogether (Eph. ii. 13, &c.).

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TEMPLE OF RELIGION—a house of prayer, &c. If this description applied to the Jewish temple, how much more to the Christian Church (Heb. x. 21). The temple is not a theatre for display, &c., but a house of prayer (1 Tim. iii. 15). In public ordinances prayer should be considered as of first importance. There is everything to encourage prayer—

1. In the temple itself. This was eminently true of the ancient temple—erected not for preaching, but for worship. Everything in the *furniture* and in the *service* of the temple to encourage prayer. So in our worship—the day on which we meet, &c.

2. In the character of the Deity who presides in it. Was He not their covenant God, &c.? Do we not view Him under more encouraging titles, &c.? Let us avail ourselves of the privileges, &c.

3. In the circumstances of the worshippers. Were they not a chosen people, &c.? All these meet in our worship? What arguments for prayer from our lost condition, &c.

4. In the comprehensive aspect of our devotions.

II. THE TRUE CHARACTER OF ACCEPTABLE WORSHIPPERS.

It is not enough to be found in the temple, we must sustain the requisite qualifications of worshippers. It is not enough to join a church, &c., but we must possess the leading features of Christ's disciples, else our worship is a mockery, our profession vain. This is evinced—

1. By the spiritual affections which they cherish towards God,—they love Him, they serve Him, they make an open profession of His name. These are fruits which do not grow in nature's wilderness, &c.

2. By the reverence they pay to His institutions. A regard to the Sabbath marked these strangers, and will always mark spiritual Christians. These men would not be found in the temple one part of the day, and in the field another, &c.

3. By their tenacious regard to the great foundations of human hope—God's covenant.

III. THE INVALUABLE PRIVILEGES THEY MAY EXPECT TO ENJOY.

1. They shall be introduced into the visible Church. Every disqualification removed. 2. Their sacrifices and services shall be accepted. 3. Their satisfaction and joy shall abound. —*Samuel Thodey.*

THE SABBATH.

lvi. 6, 7. *Every one that keepeth the Sabbath, &c.* (a).

The intimate connection between special privileges and special obligations has been observed in all ages. After the rich promises of Gospel blessings, we find in this chapter a strenuous enforcement of religious observances. A sincere belief of Christian truth will be followed by a faithful performance of Christian duties; for the one has a great influence upon the other. Where the doctrines are not believed, the duties will not be practised. The Sabbath has been regarded as a kind of hedge, or fence, to the whole law.

I. THE SACREDNESS OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE SABBATH.

Here, keeping the Sabbath, and laying hold on the covenant are identical; hence the Jewish doctors spoke advisedly when they declared the institution of the Sabbath to be the condensation and perfection of the whole law.

1. Look back upon the early, or patriarchal Sabbath, beginning with the creation of the world. Think how early it was appointed by God Himself in paradise, for the Sabbath is only one day younger than the creation of the world. The argument is plain, that if man required a Sabbath, when there were only two people in the world, how much more needful has it become when the world is crowded with inhabitants and with temptations to sin. Without such a day, it would have been most difficult for the corrupt nature of man to have maintained the true worship of God in the world. But a seventh day holy to the Lord would distinguish those who called on the name of the Lord, &c.

2. The Jewish Sabbath naturally succeeds the patriarchal, though accompanied by the change of the day to commemorate the departure from Egypt (Exod. xvi. 22, 23, and others). The violation of the sanctity of this day was marked by severe penalties, &c.

3. The Christian Sabbath. The real obligation of the Jewish Sabbath could extend no further than the close of that economy; and under the Christian economy we are prepared to expect some further change of the day. How silently this change was brought about! As Christ silently abrogated the Jewish passover by the institution of the Lord's Supper without formally announcing it, so He silently abrogated the seventh-day Sabbath of the Jews, and transferred all its honours and sanctities to the first day of the week, &c.

II. THE SIN OF PROFANING IT—diverting it from a sacred to a common use (see p. 595). It is a sin against—1. God. Very prevalent. 2. Man. 3. Your own souls. 4. A sin that, persisted in, cannot be repaired.

III. THE BLESSINGS CONSEQUENT UPON ITS SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCE. 1. Temporal 2. Spiritual. 3. Eternal. (See p. 595).—*Samuel Thodey.*

(a) See Outlines on ch. lvi. 2; lviii. 13, 14.

THE DIVINE CENTRE.

lvi. 7. *Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, &c.*

The vision of the prophet is twofold in this chapter. He sees the chosen people scattered and gathered—sent into captivity and restored. The vision also enlarges its scope, and the restoration includes the deliverance of the Gentile world from the bondage of sin. To the stranger and the eunuch a promise is made that the final restoration of the race will include them. In spite of Jewish prejudices the larger hope appears, at intervals, in the narrower forms of worship.

I. THE CENTRE OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.—"My holy mountain, My house of prayer." 1. The worship of the one God demands this. Polytheism, although it had its temples and festivals, had no unity of purpose, but a variety of gods and forms. Where ignorance has grown into superstition, nature's forces have been deified. The

one temple at Jerusalem, with its one priesthood, fixed the minds of the people on the one God. The one Calvary, with its one Mediator between God and men, secures the same end. The one sanctuary where you worship from week to week, reminds you that God is one. We hear much in the present day about the beautiful, the songs of birds, the murmurs of the streams, the rustling of leaves, &c., and thus there are so many things to admire —so many gods to worship. Remember that God has hallowed the one place, and put His name there. 2. Concentration of religious thought requires it. It is a matter of grave importance, and of considerable difficulty to worship God in spirit and in truth. For this we need a consecrated spot, pure associations, and spiritual companions. Whatever art may contribute, whatsoever the influence of man may produce, and whatever power there is in numbers, to assist the soul to ascend towards the throne of God in adoration is their greatest service. 3. It is a restfulness which the heart of the Christian longs for. Every Jew had his spiritual home at Jerusalem; every saint rests where his Saviour is worshipped. The child of ten has more hold of this earth than the man of years. Every day unsettles us, except we have a place and a name among the sons and daughters of Sion.

II. THE ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT. They are three, arising from the great departments of life. 1. Intellectual. To commune with God is the highest exercise of thought. God's house is the place where mind ascends towards the mind which is in Christ Jesus. It is, above everything, the house of prayer. 2. Moral. There must be burnt-offerings and sacrifices. The moral sense in man cannot approach God except through a sacrifice. The great sacrifice of Calvary is the way to the Father. Jesus is the Priest of the house. 3. Emotional. They are made joyful. They sing songs of deliverance. They enjoy the communion of saints. They are filled with the peace of God. They are accepted in the Beloved. There is gladness of heart where the presence of God is enjoyed. Much more than is at present customary should be the reverence for the sanctuary and its worship.—*The Weekly Pulpit*, vol. i. p. 120.

THE JOYFULNESS OF GOD'S HOUSE.

lvi. 7. *I will make them joyful in My house of prayer.*

I. **The persons to whom the text refers** (vers. 2–6).

II. **The declaration made.**

1. In taking away sadness and its causes. Sin, condemnation, slavish dread, &c. 2. By giving the Spirit of adoption; the evidence of their sonship; the source of their blessedness. 3. By inspiring hopes of the future. 4. By the sanctification of their providential experiences (Rom. viii. 28). God guiding, protecting, blessing, &c.

III. **The special place of this promise of God.**

The Tabernacle was God's house—the Temple—every holy synagogue. Now, "Wherever two or three are gathered," &c. 1. Our places of worship belong to God. They are for God, and God dwells in them—meets, communes, sanctifies, and owns. 2. They are pre-eminently houses of prayer. Here God is known as the hearer and answerer of prayer. Here is the true prayer-book to guide our prayers; promises to prayer; the spirit of prayer. Not exclusively hearing, meditating, &c., but prayer pre-eminently.

IV. THE CHARACTER AND CONNECTION OF THIS JOY WITH GOD'S HOUSE OF PRAYER.

1. See the connection with the exercises of this house. Joy and prayer. Joy and the Word. Joy and the ordinances. Joy and the praises. Joy and the blessings. How clear all this! But look at it—2. In connection with the persons, as well as the exercises, God's people there; God's ministering

servants there; God Himself there—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 3. See it in connection with the experiences of this house. Most persons have been enlightened, convicted, converted, sanctified, comforted, fed there, &c. 4. See it in connection with this house and the house above. House of God, the gate of Heaven. Ladder here, angels here, foretaste here. As Mount of Olives to Christ.

CONCLUSION.—1. The blessedness of true religion. Not gloom and despondency, but "joy"—abundant, Divine, heavenly, everlasting. 2. The preciousness of God's house. 3. The corresponding duties and privileges. "Not forsaking," &c., sustaining, helping, &c. We should bring others with us to share the blessedness. All men desire joyousness of soul, here it is supplied.—*J. Burns, D.D.: Sketches*, pp. 384–386.

OTHERS TO BE GATHERED.

lvi. 8. *The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel, &c.*

God's work is now that of gathering, &c.

I. ENCOURAGEMENT TO THOSE WHO SEEK THE LORD. Note well the instances mentioned: instances of gathering by the hand of the Lord. Outcasts have been gathered, and this is the token that others shall be gathered. 1. I suppose Isaiah alludes to the banished who had been carried away captive to Babylon and to all parts of the East, but who were at different times restored to their land. God, who brought His people out of Babylon, can bring men out of sin; He who loosed captives from bondage, can liberate spirits from despair, &c. 2. But I prefer to use the text in reference to our Divine Lord and Master, seeing that to Him shall the gathering of the people be. When He was here below He gathered the outcasts of Israel. (1.) By His ministry (Luke xv. 1, 2, &c.). (2.) By forgiving their sins. This brought them nearer still and held them there. (3.) By graciously helping them. Magdalene, Thomas. Since He gathered to Himself a woman out of whom He cast seven devils, and a man from whom a whole legion were made to flee, why should He not deliver those of you who are under bondage now? (4.) So as to enrol them under His banner. Levi, when he sat at the receipt of custom. Three thousand souls on the day of Pentecost.

II. THE PROMISE UTTERED. 1. It is very wide. The Gentiles should be called to know the Lord. 2. It is continuous. It was true when Isaiah stated it; it would have been true if Peter had quoted it on the morning of Pentecost. It was quite true when Carey acted upon it, and started on what men thought his mad enterprise, to go as a consecrated cobbler to convert the learned Brahmins of India, and to lay the foundation of Messiah's kingdom there. It is quite as true now. 3. It is most graciously encouraging. It evidently applies very pointedly to outcasts. If not an outcast from society, it may be you are an outcast in your own esteem. How sweetly encouraging this should be to all of you that are sick of yourselves, and sick of your sins! There is no hope elsewhere, but there is hope in Jesus, for He is mighty to deliver, &c. Trust in Him. 4. The promise is absolute. He speaks as a king. This is the kind of language which only an Omnipotent being can use.

III. THE FACTS WHICH SUSTAIN OUR FAITH IN THIS PROMISE. We believe it, whether or no; fact or no fact, to back it up, God's Word is sure; but still this will help some who have but slender confidence. 1. The perpetuity of the Gospel. 2. The blood of atonement has not lost its power. 3. The Spirit of God is with us still. 4. The glory and majesty of the Gospel, or rather the greatness of the glory of God in the Gospel. 5. The longings of the saints.

IV. THE CONDUCT CONSISTENT WITH THIS PROMISE.

1. Let us view this question with reference to God's people. Believe it, and then pray about it. If you pray, you must work, for prayer without endeavour is hypocrisy; expect to see others gathered. Look out for them, and be continually saying, "Where are these others?" 2. Those who have not yet been gathered. They should be encouraged to hope. What God has done for others He can do for you.—*C. H. Spurgeon. Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1437.

The Flock: its Guardians and its Devourers.

lvi. 9. *All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest.*

These words are to be understood as a note of warning, a sound of alarm. It is not that God wishes His flock to be devoured that He thus summons the beasts of prey to gather round the fold; on the contrary, He is concerned for their safety, and warns them of the danger in which they stand. So defenceless and unprotected is the flock, that ferocious animals may come and devour as much as they please without resistance or opposition. No style of address was better fitted to startle both flock and shepherds from their careless security. God's flock is still surrounded by ravenous beasts. The Church needs to be on the watch against pernicious doctrines, evil influences, and corrupt practices, that would undermine her faith and rob her of her life. Her enemies are as defiant as ever, and assail her in various forms. It may be well for us, then, to hear and attend to this warning voice.

I. The unprotected state of the flock. The figure employed is familiar to us. A minister is a pastor, *i.e.* a shepherd, and the people of his charge, a flock. They have been solemnly intrusted to his care, and he is responsible for their spiritual guidance, protection, and support. He is to lead them by the green pastures of Divine truth, and tenderly and lovingly to watch over their highest interests, defending them from harmful influences. In the East, the shepherd has such a genuine interest in his flock that he makes it his constant care. Hence the aptness of the figure. But in the case before us *the sheep are shamefully neglected.* The fold is open to attack, and the beasts of the field and of the forest have but to come and devour to their hearts' content. Read what follows the text, and you will find the explanation. What could the state of the flock be with such shepherds—careless, indolent, unfaithful, selfish, and sensual? The picture is drawn from the life, and may well be pondered by every minister of the Word. Those who exercise the sacred office may here learn the special sins which they are liable to indulge, the gross faults from which they ought to be entirely free.

There is another use which may be made of this fearful indictment brought against Israel's leaders and teachers. If this shameful neglect of theirs left the flock exposed to the ravages of wild beasts, *the opposite course must tend to secure its safety and well-being.* Pray, then, for your minister (Eph. vi. 19; Phil. i. 19; 2 Thess. iii. 1). It is always a cheering reflection that if, through the human weakness and incapacity of the earthly shepherd, the flock does stand exposed to attack at some points, the Chief Shepherd never for a moment intermits His care, and can overrule for blessing the ravages of the destroyer (Ezek. xxxiv. 12–16). The fiercest onsets of the foe will only reveal the almighty power that guards the flock. It is the duty of the Church's overseers to protect their charges, to warn them of possible onsets, and to keep watch at the gate of the fold. If they neglect these precautions, they are only playing into the hands of those who come to devour.

II. The wild beasts that threaten to devour the flock.—In the field, in the forest, they growl and rage, watching their opportunity of seizing

some stray sheep, or of entering the fold when the gate is left open. In the East several shepherds lead their flocks into the same fold, and intrust them to an under-shepherd or porter, who closes the gate, and remains with them all night. If he be careless, much havoc may be wrought before daybreak (John x. 12, 13). We may expect that prowlers will always be hanging about the fold. Scripture itself forewarns us (Acts xx. 29, 30). In all the generations of the past the Church of Christ has been menaced by devourers, and has suffered much from their depradations. Satan goeth about as a roaring lion (1 Pet. v. 8), but he has numerous assistants and agents in his service. Some are *open and undisguised;* others are *wily and insidious.* When the lion, the bear, the wolf are seen in their own proper shape, or are heard growling around the fold, the shepherd has but one course—steady resistance, closed gates. With infidels and agnostics, whose aim is to undermine faith and morals,—with Romanists, who sadly pervert the truth, we can deal only in the way of determined and deathless opposition. But it is otherwise with the second class of assailants. The roaring lion does not always roar to give signal of his approach; sometimes he presents himself as a bright angel of light (1 Cor. xi. 13, 14). The wolves do not always growl as they rush to the onset; they can come up stealthily in sheep's clothing, so artfully put on that you can scarcely detect the deception. With much show of zeal, and spirituality, these professed friends are really pernicious enemies. They craftily conceal their real principles, until their victim is fairly ensnared. Their aim is "to draw away disciples after them." They do not labour among the careless: their efforts are directed to the subversion of church members. They save themselves the trouble of excavating, by seizing on the stones already quarried and dressed. Laying hold of the young convert, they instil the subtle poison of their pernicious doctrines into his mind.

CONCLUSION. — 1. *Neglect not the means of grace.* If it be the pastor's duty to feed and warn you, it is your part to heed the warning he may find it necessary to give (1 Thess. v. 12, 13; Heb. xiii. 17; 2 Cor. i. 24). 2. *We point you to the Chief Shepherd,* who gave His life for the sheep. He can restrain the enemies of the flock (Ezek. xxxiv. 23–25). He can and will keep His own (John x. 27, 28). On which side do you find yourselves? In Christ's fold, or among its ravenous spoilers? (Matt. xiii. 30).—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

WORTHLESS SHEPHERDS.

lvi. 10–12. *His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, &c.*

A very sad description is here given of the "watchmen"—the spiritual leaders of Isaiah's time, evincing a state of lamentable degeneracy and corruption. The language has often been, and still is, descriptive of many shepherds of the flock.

I. Ignorant. Immersed in sin themselves, they were blind to the sins, and wants, and dangers of the people—destitute of spiritual wisdom and discernment (ch. xxix. 18; xxxv. 5; xlii. 7, 16–19; xliii. 8, &c.; Jer. iii. 15). Like the blind guides of the Gospel (Matt. xv. 14; Luke vi. 39, &c.). Ignorance of "the truth as it is in Jesus" is an effectual disqualification for the office. What irreparable evil may be wrought by such blind guides!

II. Indolent. What a graphic and striking description of an indolent ministry. True of many to-day, who act as though hearers were won by idleness (Prov. vi. 10). 'Instinct prompts the canine race to act the part which God intends; but, alas! there are *men in the ministry* whom neither conscience, reason, hope, fear, nor love will rouse to effort to save souls. Instead of acting as faithful watch-dogs, who give warning of the approach of danger by their barking, they remain apathetic, and utter no warning. It is as if they passed their lives in sleep. What a

terrible awakening they will one day experience!

III. Covetous. They keep up the old custom, rejected by the higher prophets as an abuse, of taking fees (Num. xxii. 7; 1 Sam. ix. 7; 1 Kings xiv. 3; 2 Kings v. 16; Matt. x. 8; Acts viii. 20; Ezek. xiii. 19; xxii. 25; Micah iii. 3). They are "greedy" after gain. All their inquiry is what they shall get, not what they shall do (Phil. ii. 21). They never have enough (Eccles. v. 10). They are careful for their dues—tithes, collections, pew-rents, &c., rather than for souls. "Ambitious of preferment for its gold." Yet they are set apart not to promote their own interests, but the welfare and salvation of others. What possible effect for good can their preaching have? They do inconceivable injury to the cause of truth, for it is evident they do not live for their *charge*, but for *themselves*.

IV. Intemperate. Given to excess in wine, and to long revels, such as even the heathen considered to be disgraceful (ch. xxviii. 7). One is represented as inviting another to a carouse of two days. Their frailty and mortality little thought of; no dread of the judgment of God, &c. Living only for carnal gratification, they cannot think of making sacrifices for souls. Of all evils, intemperance is most unbecoming to the minister of Christ, and prevents his rebuking vice in others with any practical effect.

Conclusion. — What a humiliation that such men are allowed to remain in the Church! Such shepherds make the Church lifeless and barren. How strikingly in Saint Paul's character are developed the marks of a good shepherd—one that careth for the sheep (Phil. i. 8; iv. 1; and others). If such intense yearning characterised all the shepherds of Israel now, what a different Church we should have! We hear much about the reformation of the government; is not the reformation of the ministry more needful? Let the Church, therefore, take the greatest possible care in separating men to this work and office.—*A. Tucker.*

Procrastination, or Presuming on the Future.

lvi. 12. *To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.*

There is a marked and melancholy inconsistency between the admissions which men make, and the course of conduct which they pursue. The uncertainty of life is universally granted, yet men think, and talk, and act confidently on the credit of "to-morrow," and, not seldom, of much longer periods. Procrastination is—

I. Painfully common. A very old evil (Ex. viii. 10, and others). We are all more or less guilty of it, for all our purposes and plans reach into a future which will never be ours. Specially manifested in relation to experimental religion. All ages and classes indulge in it. The young look to middle age, the more advanced to the last stage of life, &c. "To-morrow" is the prevailing maxim;—a maxim which few pretend to justify, but on which the vast majority persist in acting; a maxim of which all grant the folly in words, and by the admission condemn their own practice. Men of business often warn the young against the evil in relation to this life, yet act on the principle they condemn respecting interests incomparably more momentous. Strange infatuation! What has been *your* conduct?

II. Shamefully ungrateful. A practical disregard of all the mercy and love of God. The unnumbered blessings of His gracious providence. The richer blessings of His grace in Christ Jesus. The enormity of ingratitude to God. "The ass, after having drunk, gives a kick to the bucket" (Italian). God's greatest miracle is His patience and bounty to the ungrateful.

III. Palpably unreasonable. 1. True religion is supremely important. The only source of true happiness; of support amid the trials of life; of peace in death; and of a blissful immortality. 2. Delay increases difficulties. You

may not think so; you imagine the future will present more favourable opportunities than the present, &c. But that is manifestly unreasonable, for, owing to the known laws of habit, every day's delay increases the difficulties, &c. Sin gets a firmer hold upon you. Your experience bears witness. If you do not decide to-day, it becomes less likely that you ever will, &c. 3. You have no evidence that you will live till to-morrow. You cannot calculate on the future (Prov. xxvii. 1). The Gospel may never be preached to you again, &c.

IV. EXCEEDINGLY SINFUL. 1. It encourages others to continue in their sins. Your to-day, is a day of evil example, &c. 2. It robs God of His due—your best affections, &c. Religion is not a mere creed, &c., but an obligation, founded on absolute proprietorship and mediatorial interposition (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). 3. It practically disregards God's commands. Repentance and faith, &c., are immediate duties. "The imperative hath no future tense." 4. It involves the abuse of all the means which God is graciously employing for your salvation. Resisting the strivings of His Spirit, &c.

V. IMMINENTLY DANGEROUS. Danger is always associated with sin. Increases with every day's delay. To-morrow may be for ever too late. "Hell is paved with good intentions." To delay is to court ruin.

CONCLUSION.—Presume not on the patience of God. Do not longer calculate on to-morrow. Yield yourself to God NOW (Heb. iii. 7: 2 Cor. vi. 2; Prov. i. 24–31). You will never regret the step. But if you continue to befool yourself, every day will add its weight of guilt and sorrow. *The Holy Ghost saith* TO-DAY.—*A. Tucker.*

THE DEATH OF THE GOOD.

(Funeral Sermon.)

lvii. 1, 2. *The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart, &c.*

I. **Though God's people are the excellent of the earth, yet they must die.** Though "righteous" and "merciful," and on these accounts so precious in God's eyes, and so useful in His cause, they are not exempted from that sentence of death which is passed upon all men. Were we consulted concerning many of them, we should entreat that they might be spared, and we see not how the cause of truth can be maintained without them. But they are "taken away," to show us that though God uses them as instruments, they are not indispensable to Him. It is our want of faith and our selfishness that cause us to wish them not to be removed. They themselves desire to "depart," &c.

II. **Their death is a great blessing to themselves.** They are "taken away," but—1. *It is to be with Christ.* The word here translated "taken away" is often translated "gathered." When saints die, it is merely a gathering to Christ. And will not they account this a blessing? Being gathered to Christ includes, not simply His presence (though this is the choicest part of heaven), but the presence of the angels and of the spirits of the just made perfect. What a varied and glorious company do they form! 2. *It is from the evil to come.* From calamities and distresses that would otherwise befall them. From Satan's temptations. From the persecutions of an ungodly world. From the sad corruptions of their own hearts, which distress them daily. From all the cares, conflicts, and sorrows connected with a mortal existence and a sinful state. 3. *It is to rest and peace.*

III. **It is a grievous, though a common sin, that when men behold the death of the righteous, they do not lay it to heart.** 1. As *a public loss!* When such men die, the Church loses its ornaments, the world its best friends. Well may we mourn individually, when the hallowing influence of a godly character ceases to be exerted upon us. 2. As *a public warning;*

CONCLUSION.—1. Let us make the best

use of our godly relations and friends while they live. 2. When our godly friends are "taken away," let us not sorrow as those who have no hope. 3. Let us make sure that we are gathered to Christ *now*, that we may be gathered to Him hereafter. — *James Sherman: Thursday Penny Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 1–12.

The characteristics here described are those produced by the operation of God's grace in human hearts.

I. The prophet notices a familiar fact.

We find it difficult to regard death as other than an enemy. With the exception of Enoch, and Elijah, and perhaps Moses, and those who will be alive when the Lord comes, the reign of death is universal (Eccles. ix. 2; Rom. v. 12; H. E. I. 1536, 1537). God's people do not escape. Here a question arises: Since the redemption in Christ removes their sins, why should they be retained under the bondage of death? We suggest in answer—1. That possibly man was never intended to abide perpetually on the globe, but after a lengthened probation to be removed to a higher existence. 2. The necessity for the removal of one generation to make room for another. 3. The wisdom of the arrangement by which old age is ultimately relieved of the weariness and infirmity incident to it. 4. The danger to the spiritual affections of the saints involved in a perpetuated residence on earth. 5. The exemption of believers from death would be an open declaration of and mark upon them; but such open destruction does not accord with the design of this world as a state of trial and discipline. 6. That by the grace of Christ the aspect of death is entirely changed to believers. 7. That the humiliation and sorrow of death are amply compensated by the glorious resurrection and immortal life.

II. The prophet laments the general indifference with which this familiar fact is treated.

This may refer specially to the time of Manasseh, but it is still true.

1. The world does not love the righteous, because they are such. If they care for them at all, it is for other reasons. So far as what is peculiar to them severally is developed, it is antagonistic.

2. The world is indifferent to the fact that the death of the righteous is a public loss. Godly men in their families, neighbourhoods, the nation, by their character, prayers, public spirit are a preserving influence. Sodom could not be destroyed while Lot was in it.

3. The world does not consider the true import and consequence of the death of the righteous. It is not considered in relation to eternity; but only in relation to time. Such a one is dead, his new life is not considered.

III. The prophet suggests the sufficient consolation. To the righteous death is—1. *Exemption from evil.* Terrible evil was coming on Israel which those escaped who died at that time. There may be public, domestic, and personal evils impending, from which the Lord snatches His people away. 2. *Enjoyment of good.* The Gospel does not conduct its votaries to the bed of death, and then leave them there in dark uncertainty. The change that is made by death is their entrance into *peace* and *rest*. For there is final and undisturbed security, and the perpetual presence of the objects to which the believer's spirit has been most closely united; God in Christ, holy angels, glorified saints, perfect purity.

1. How interesting to those left behind, to think of them thus! 2. See that you are among those of whom such thoughts are suitable. 3. Beware of being among those who are indifferent to the people of God and their fate. The world's indifference to the Church is the reflection of its indifference to Christ.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The visitations of death are frequently mysterious. Often the most talented, and pious, and useful are cut down, while mere cumberers of the ground are spared, &c. Piety exempts none from the arrests of death; it delivers from the sting of death, but

not from its stroke. How affecting the death of a statesman, a minister, an influential Christian, or a pious parent in the meridian of life and usefulness, &c. Isaiah was deeply moved in consequence of the death of good men, and the indifference of his countrymen, &c. It matters little that we cannot accurately determine who these good men were, or the manner of their death. Consider—

I. The character of the good as here portrayed.

1. *They are righteous.* As none are so naturally, a real and radical change in the governing dispositions of the heart is implied, &c. Believing in the Lord Jesus, and being accepted righteous in Him, they come under an obligation to practise universal righteousness, and to present to the world a character of uniform and sustained holiness (Rom. vi. 18, 19; 1 John iii. 7). They are men of rectitude—men right in their moral relations and in their principles of action—right in heart, and habit, and life (1 John iii. 7). Such a man, however, will always feel that his claim to be regarded as a righteous man is not to be traced to what he is in himself, but to what he owes to the grace of God. 2. *They are merciful.* Not only the subjects of God's mercy, but merciful in their own dispositions—"men of kindness or godliness" (margin); forgiving offenders, compassionating the suffering, helping the weak and needy, and evincing kindness, consideration, and bountifulness towards all (Gen. xxxii. 10; Ps. cxix. 64; Joel ii. 13; Rom. xii. 8; Col. iii. 12). In nothing do we imitate God more than in showing mercy. And we have abundant opportunity to do it, for the world is full of sin and misery, which we may help to relieve, &c. 3. *They walk in their uprightness.* They avoid the crooked path of sin, and pursue the straight line of righteousness (Ps. cxxv. 5; Prov. ii. 15; Isa. lix. 8; Phil. ii. 15). The Christian life does not consist in mere sentiment or feeling, &c. Feeling and practice, like twin sisters, must go hand in hand. Christianity is pre-eminently a practical system. The doctrine of the kingdom is, that "faith without works is dead"—that faith contains a seed of virtue or holy living, so that good works are not an *adjunct* of faith, but a *necessary fruit* of faith. Light must shine, and where there are the principles of holiness there will be all the habits of holiness pervading the whole life.

Is this a description of *your* character? Have you sought and secured "the righteousness of faith;" are you showing mercy to all men, walking uprightly, &c.?

II. The death of the good as here presented.

1. *As the perishing of the body.* The soul lives on, and will do for ever; but the mortal body decays, returns to its native dust, &c. The bodies of all the untold myriads of the human race have perished. The mightiest share the same fate as the meanest. Evident to all. Then why pamper the body, &c.

2. *As disregarded by the vast majority.* Only the few lay it to heart—lament it as a public loss, and regard it as a public warning. How soon the best are forgotten! How can we account for this? (1.) The commonness of the event. (2.) The thought of death is repugnant. (3.) The concerns of life engross both the time and attention of the multitude. This general disregard of the death of the good is to be lamented because it it implies—(1.) Painful ingratitude. Good men are the world's greatest benefactors, "the salt of the earth," &c. (2.) Deplorable moral insensibility. Their removal is a public calamity, for they are the strength of a nation and the safeguard of the land, &c. To treat their death with stolid indifference indicates the highest degree of moral blindness and perversity. Of such a state of things there is but one explanation—"God is not in all their thoughts." Little children least lament the death of their parents, because they know not what a loss it is to them, &c.

3. *As a blessing to themselves.* (1.)

They are delivered from the miseries which attend the sins of man. Whatever they are, the good man escapes them by death (1 Kings xiv. 10–13; 2 Kings xxii. 20). (2.) They enter into peace—rest. Their *bodies* "rest in their beds" or graves. The grave is a quiet resting-place, out of which they shall rise refreshed on the morning of the resurrection. No agitations or alarms can disturb their peaceful slumbers (Job iii. 17; xvii. 16; Ps. xvi. 19, 2 Chron. xi. 14; Isa. xiv. 18). Their *souls* enter into the rest of heaven—the world of eternal repose, where peace is in perfection. They rest not only from all trouble, but from all sin, and sorrow, and strife, from everything that can create pain and uneasiness, for "the former things are done away" (Rev. xiv. 13; Heb. iv. 9). No wave of trouble shall roll into that beautiful and peaceful haven, and the sense of past trouble will only add to the intensity of present enjoyment.

Such are the prospects of the good. If they were highly consoling and encouraging to the troubled prophet, they ought to be the more so to us, for we have added the disclosures of the Gospel, by which "life and immortality are brought to light." Then let us take encouragement as the rest and recompense opens to the eye of faith, &c. Sweet thought; we are nearing it every Sabbath. But no such prospects gladden those of you who are unconverted. If you would die the death of the righteous, you must live the life of the righteous, &c. (P. D. 1124).—*A. Tucker.*

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lvii. 5–9. I. The abominable idolatries of Israel. II. A parallel found in the covetousness and worldliness of professing Christians. III. These evils proceed from the same principles of unbelief. IV. Are equally offensive to God and debasing to the human mind. V. Must as certainly occasion final retribution.

lvii. 6. I. Human substitutes for true and spiritual worship. II. Their offensiveness to God.—*Dr. Lyth.*

The Soul's Weariness in its Sinful Way.

lvii. 10. *Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way, &c.*

There is a littleness and there is a greatness in men's sins. Some people are mean, timid in wickedness, would indulge passions more freely if they dared. But there is a force and boldness about the sins of others; they disregard public opinion, rush impetuously along broad roads, &c. Whilst we condemn, we also mourn, because such strength and manhood are wasted in the "greatness of their way."

The text refers to a period of great iniquity in Jewish history during Manasseh's reign. The light of Divine truth had not utterly faded away, so the nation was full of unrest and misery, and yet would not retrace its steps, and make its peace with God. Pathetic is this picture of the misery of sin.

I. The soul's weariness in its sinful way.

Various are the causes of weariness.

1. *The attempt of the creature to be independent of the Creator.* A sinful life is an attempt to do without God. But our noblest instincts impel us to lean upon the power and love of God. Dependence is stamped upon every faculty and fibre of our nature. Who then can wonder that men grow weary when they strive to live an independent, self-sufficient life? The creature can no more do without the Creator, than streamlet without fountain, or branch without tree.

2. *A sense of the unworthiness of a sinful life.* No one can be really happy without some degree of self-respect. Other persons can laud a man to the skies, but it spoils all if in his heart he despises his own motives and conduct. Self-contempt is a source of keenest misery. There are moments of clear insight, when many a Christless man sees the utter disproportion between the life which he leads, and the nature God has given him—between what he *is* and what he was *meant* to

be, and *might* be. When he thus begins to despise himself he is "wearied."

3. *The efforts of an outraged nature to avenge itself.* It is impossible for a man to ill-treat himself without his very nature protesting against the injury. There are forces of pain which start into activity as soon as the evil is done. The body avenges its own wrongs—so also the soul. Give it error when it needs truth; husks of worldly pleasure when it hungers for bread of life, and a cry of discontent and pain will break forth from the injured soul. So the path of sin is a tiresome road, and men often grow "wearied."

II. THE SOUL'S PERSISTENCE IN ITS SINFUL WAY.

Weary but persistent. Many things impel men to pursue the road even when faint.—1. *The marvellous vitality of hope.* Hope is like a hardy plant, which may be trampled under foot, but presently springs up into fresh life and beauty. Men are often baffled, deceived, achieve grand results, led on by living energy of hope. Yet all great things draw greatly astray when wrongly directed. So hope impels men to persist in folly and sin. Disappointed, wearied, they still persevere.—2. *Dislike to confess failure.* It seems a degradation to many a man to admit that he has made a mistake. Pride often leads the sinner to persist in his way. Weary at heart, yearning for a nobler life, still it is hard work for him to humble himself, to go back, to say, "I have sinned."—3. *Ignorance of God's character.* Some think they are beyond Divine mercy—that God is "altogether such an one" as themselves—impatient and unforgiving toward those who have wronged Him. Weary souls would sometimes eagerly return to Him, and seek His grace, if they only saw into the depths of His heart and knew the truth.

CONCLUSION.—There is a Divine purpose in pain and weariness. God makes the sinner's way difficult, so that he may be led to forsake it. When we cry, "There is no hope," then there *is* hope through Christ, who was once wearied in the greatness of HIS way. —*F. W. Mays, M.A.: The Homiletic Magazine*, vol. vii. p. 145.

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lvii. 11, 12. I. Hypocrisy. Fearless, false, inconsiderate, presumptuous. II. Its exposure. Certain, full. Its righteousness, nought; its works, wicked; its hopes, vain.

12. I. Men's righteousness. II. Its exposure. III. Its worthlessness.

13–16. I. The insufficiency of human confidences. II. The all-sufficiency of God.

13. I. False confidences. Cannot save. Will be swept away. End in destruction and misery. II. True confidence. Fixed in God. Enjoys present blessings. Inherits future happiness.

14. I. The stumbling-blocks. Inconsistencies. Errors. Divisions. False professors. II. Their removal. Necessary. Imperative. Personal.—*Dr. Lyth.*

THE GLORY OF GOD THE COMFORT OF THE CONTRITE.

lvii. 15. *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, &c.*

I. A MAGNIFICENT DESCRIPTION OF THE GREATNESS OF GOD.

His glory appears—1. *In His essential majesty.* He is "the high and lofty One"—exalted far above us, out of human view and conception; the one mighty Author, Creator, Preserver, and Lord of all; to whom none other is like (Neh. ix. 5; H. E. I. 2225–2228). 2. *In the immutability of His existence.* He "inhabiteth eternity." What a sublime expression! (Ps. xc. 1–4; H. E. I. 2253; P.D. 2536). 3. *In the infinite rectitude of His character.* "Whose name is Holy." By the holiness of God we mean the unity and harmony in Him of every species of moral goodness in its highest measure, or rather beyond measure; this forms His distinguishing glory (H. E. I. 2275, 2818). 4. *In the exalted place of abode where He more immediately manifests His presence.*

II. AN INSTRUCTIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE TEMPER WHICH SHOULD EVER RULE IN THE MIND AND HEART OF MAN WHEN BEFORE THIS GREAT GOD.

1. As a frail, mortal, feeble creature, who is "crushed before the moth," *humility* is the proper temper for man before God. Even angels and archangels veil their faces with their wings in His presence.

2. As transgressors, it behoves us to be abased in the awful presence of the Most High. Something more than humility becomes man as an offender against his rightful Sovereign. *Contrition* is more; it is penitence for sin, brokenness of heart for having offended God. The first is always man's duty as a creature; the second, as a sinner. Two things contribute to real contrition: (1) A sense of God's gracious, benignant character. Nothing sets man's frightful ingratitude in so odious and prominent a light as the unspeakable goodness of the great God. So long as man falsely conceives of Him as a hard master, he feels, he can feel, no contrition; but when he discerns that God is, and ever has been, infinitely good, and to him also, his heart bursts with ingenuous grief and self-abhorrence. (2) A perception of the inscrutable wickedness of the human heart, which, like the prophet Ezekiel's "chamber of imagery," discloses more and more of its interior abominations, the more closely it is examined. To produce this contrition of soul is one principle object of Divine teaching and grace (Ezek. xxxvi. 26; xii. 10; xvi. 63).

The presence in any man of this humility is certain to be manifested in an unmistakable manner, the manifestation itself further preparing him for the Divine mercy. A proud heart murmurs under rebuke, like the children of Israel in the wilderness; or rejects warnings like the men in the days of Noah and of Lot; or dares God to His face, like Pharaoh. So acted the majority of the men to whom Isaiah ministered (ch. ix. 13). But the contrite and humble in spirit receive the Divine rebukes, justify God in His righteous retributions, condemn themselves, and venture only to "hope in His mercy" (Job xxxiv. 32; xlii. 5, 6; Ps. cxix. 75; lxix. 20).

III. AN UNRIVALLED DESCRIPTION OF THE MARVELLOUS CONDESCENSION OF GOD TO THE MAN IN WHOM THERE IS THIS RIGHT TEMPER.

1. *God adopts the heart of the penitent as His abode.* The allusion is to the temple (ch. lxvi. 1, 2; John xiv. 23). The humble and contrite heart is prepared to entertain the Divine Guest: it is emptied of pride and self, &c.

2. *Observe the purpose for which He enters it:* "to revive the spirit of the humble," &c. The image is drawn from the revival of the face of nature by refreshing rain after a long drought, or from raising to new life a dejected and desponding mind by joyful and unexpected tidings. Although penitence and contrition may have done their work, comfort is still wanting, so long as the inhabitation of God by His Spirit is wanting. The daily increasing perception of innate corruption weighs down the heart. Conscience accuses, the law condemns. The joy of pardon sometimes springs up, but it fades again. The hope of being a sincere penitent cheers at times; but it is difficult for the soul to discern, amidst its tears and dejection, the marks of repentance unto life. Afflictions add to the general woe—God seems armed against the soul. But at length it pleases God to "revive the spirit," &c. He sheds light amidst the gloom, &c. The prophet doubles the expression, to denote the certainty and magnitude of the blessing. The exhausted, dying traveller, plundered, wounded, and left for dead on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, was not more truly revived by the wine and oil of the good Samaritan, than the spirit of the contrite one is revived by the presence and indwelling of the Saviour in the heart (ver. 18, and ch. lxi. 3).

3. *All this consolation flows from the view of the Divine greatness.* The whole scope of the text is directed to this one point; and almost all similar descriptions of the majesty of the Almighty are given in connection with His condescension to man (Ps. cxiii. 4–6; cxxxviii. 6, &c.). Consolation flowing from God's goodness, mercy, compas-

sion, love, is great indeed; but not so overwhelming as that which springs from His greatness, holiness, and self-existence. For (1) *The sense of favour is thus enhanced.* The condescension is more remarkable. The stooping, as it were, is from a greater height. (2) *The wonder and surprise are greater.* Why is God first set before us in such magnificence, but to magnify the subsequent condescension by its suddenness? The beginning of the text seems to prepare for just a contrary conclusion. (3) *The value of redemption is elevated by the majesty and holiness of the exalted and lofty One who dwells in the contrite heart.* For it is these very perfections of the moral Governor of the world which required such a sacrifice as the death of His only begotten Son. If you sink them, you sink the value of our redemption. (4) *The sense of security and deliverance is also greater.* If *this* God be for us, who can be against us? Our feebleness is no ground of fear, if we are sheltered in "the Rock of Ages." (5) *The final end of man seems more distinctly taken into account and provided for.* For we were made to enjoy this great God. We were endowed with all but angelic powers that we might know, adore, possess, and find our felicity in this glorious Creator.

CONCLUSION.—*Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear in the last fearful day?* If God be so glorious, what will then become of those who, like Pharaoh, refuse to humble themselves before Him? Submit, ere it be too late!—*Bishop Wilson: Sermons Delivered in India*, pp. 188–206.

Can the infinite God hold intercourse with man and interest Himself in his affairs? It seems incredible. He has made man capable of it. He has favoured some men with intercourse. He has revealed Himself as deeply interested in man, and has explained in His Word the circumstances and conditions under which He holds intercourse with us. It is not a conjecture. It is a glorious certainty. Is not this the burden of the Bible; how God the Father, through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, dwells with man? Our text is a magnificent declaration of the fact. It is—

I. A PROCLAMATION OF THE DIVINE GRANDEUR.

We cannot conceive the Divine essence. We can only think of God as possessed of certain attributes in infinite perfection; and even these we can only conceive in so far as they resemble something in ourselves, and thus as capable of expression by means of human language (H. E. I., 2230, 2234, 2236).

Think—1. Of the Divine *Eternity* (Ps. xc. 2, and others).

2. Of the Divine *Holiness.* Names with us are words selected because of some pleasant association, or adopted arbitrarily for the purpose of distinguishing one person from another. In ancient times the name was given because it expressed some quality in the person or some prophecy respecting him. Hence the Divine names in Scripture are instructive and important. "Whose name is holy." Holiness is the essential characteristic of His Being. It is like the incandescent heat; all white.

3. Of the Divine *Sublimity.* Height and depth are in relation to each other, and to all the space between their extremes. He is beyond comparison with creatures of every rank. Ascend the loftiest mountain; soar beyond the remotest star; contemplate the most exalted intellect; behold the ranks of angels and archangels—you will be as far as ever from the incomparable sublimity of God.

4. Of the Divine *Majesty.* The palace of the great King answers to the dignity of His nature. If a place must be imagined as the special dwelling-place of God, let it be beyond the hills, above the clouds, far above all heavens, adorned with the richest splendours of the universe. But this conducts us to the fact that He has another and a different dwelling-place. And this is the most astonishing announcement of the text.

II. AN ASSERTION OF THE DIVINE CONDESCENSION.

His dwelling-place below is in the heart of the lowly (Ps. xxxiv. 18; li. 17; cxxxviii. 6; cxlvii. 3; ch. lxvi. 2). Not merely permission of distant communication; but God's abiding presence, the sweet intercourse of those who dwell happily together in the same house, the blessed reunion of those who had been separated by sin.

Is not this wondrous condescension? Does the occupant of the splendid mansion choose to live among the poor? Do the lofty dwell with the lowly? Is it not the study of those only moderately uplifted to get away as soon and as far as possible from the neighbourhood of the poor? Thine is not the manner of men, O Lord God! On the principle of fitness, man, as a creature, lifted up with pride, is unfit for God's residence and companionship, because he violates the proper order, as Satan did when in his pride he contended for equality with God. Man, as a sinner, impenitent and self-satisfied, cannot be God's dwelling-place, because of the essential contrariety between holiness and sin. God and man must be like each other before they can dwell together. Now, God cannot be contrite, because He has no sin. But there can be the likeness which comes from the fitting relation of things. Humility in man corresponds to loftiness in God. Contrition in man corresponds to holiness in God. Where God finds the contrite and humble soul, He can condescend to dwell, consistently with His dignity and purity. Jesus has opened the way by which God and man may be fully reconciled and restored to each other.

Therefore does He by His grace bring the souls of His redeemed into this lowly state that He may lift them up. Therefore does He show them the evil of sin, so that they are humbled, ashamed, crushed, heart-broken. May He thus humble and thus dwell in us all! This brings us to the purpose for which He dwells in the contrite.

III. A REVELATION OF THE DIVINE BENEFICENCE.

When God enters the heart of the contrite and makes it His dwelling, it is a day of revival. For there is—1. *Comfort.* He wipes away the tears, by revealing Jesus in the fulness of His atoning sacrifice, His pardoning love, &c. 2. *Power.* The activity and energy of spiritual life. We run the way of His commandments; we are identified with His kingdom; we labour for its advancement. 3. *Growth.* Under His reviving influence, we grow in all things that pertain to the spiritual life. Spiritual manhood is developed. Fruits of holiness. When sufficiently matured, we shall be transplanted to heaven.

The proud and impenitent are without God. Get the lowly and contrite spirit.—*J. Rawlinson.*

Three questions generally asked concerning a person with whom one is not well acquainted are: What is his name? Where does he dwell? What is his work or occupation? In this verse we find replies to these three inquiries if made concerning the Divine Being.

I. THE LORD'S NAME. The name indicates that God is—1. Supreme in nature. He is infinitely above the highest of all created beings, human and angelic. 2. Supreme in character (1 Sam. ii. 2) 3. Supreme in authority. He is King o. kings, and His dominion extends over all things.

II. THE LORD'S DWELLING-PLACE. He has four dwelling-places:—1. Eternity. He fills all space. The boundaries of His habitation can never be reached. 2. Heaven—the habitation of His throne (Ps. cxxiii. 1). 3. His Church on earth. "Holy place" (1 Chron. xxiii. 25; Ps. ix. 11). 4. The contrite heart. He is so great as to fill immensity, and so condescending as to dwell in your heart and mine. God is never satisfied until He finds a home in the human soul. "Give me thine heart."

III. THE LORD'S WORK. 1. A work which none but God can do. 2. A work which God delights in above all others. 3. A work He will bring to a glorious consummation (Phil. i. 6).—*W. Roberts, Penybontfawr: "Pregethau."*

This Scripture opens up to view five great aspects of God — I. The Being. II. The character. III. The Sovereignty. IV. The dwelling-place. V. The work of God.—*W. Seward.*

I. God's greatness. II. God's grace. —*Bishop Greig: Sermons*, pp. 164–177.

Eternity Contemplated.

lvii. 15. *Eternity.*

I. *There is a period of endless duration which we call eternity* (P. D. 1118–1129, 2965, 2054, 1921–1935). The period of duration which shall elapse between the creation of man and the universal conflagration is called "time." It has already extended over nearly six thousand years, but how long its course will continue to advance we can form no conjecture. But this we know, that as it had a beginning it will certainly have an end. Eternity is duration without limits. It exceeds all our powers of reckoning, illustration, thought.

II. *In this endless period of duration there are two states extremely different, in one or other of which a portion shall be assigned to every man.* That man is immortal is capable of proof from the dictates of reason, and is authoritatively taught in the Bible. In the after-world there are two states: of happiness—heaven; of misery—hell. Both are unending.

III. *Time is given to man in order to prepare for eternity.* The present state of existence, while introductory to the future, is also preparatory, in accordance with the general law which, in every stage of our being, makes what we are to be hereafter dependent on what we do now. How shall we prepare for eternity?

IV. *It is foolish and dangerous to allow the things of time to engross the attention and the activity, that should be devoted to the things of eternity.* It is foolish, because we prefer the less to the greater, a glass bead to a nugget of gold. It is dangerous, because we enter on an endless existence unprepared.—*G. Brooks: Outlines*, p. 43.

16. I. God's controversy with men. 1. What it is. God claims a right to command; men refuse to obey An old quarrel. 2. Why it is. The rebellion of men makes God angry. Explain the scriptural meaning of the phrase, "Anger of God." Not to be resolved into a mere figure of speech. 3. How it is carried on By the lessons of His Word, by the dispensation of His providence, by the strivings of His Spirit with the conscience. Sometimes in mercy, sometimes in judgment. II. The limits which God has imposed on Himself in conducting His controversy with men. 1. The limits which He has imposed. With regard to the wicked, because the time of their visitation is past. With regard to the righteous, because the end has been attained. 2. The reason why He has imposed these limits. In consideration of human frailty.

Conclusion.—The great lesson is, that God has no delight in our suffering here or hereafter.—*G. Brooks: Outlines*, p. 143.

I. The frailty of man (see pp. 420). Physically, intellectually, spiritually. II. The compassion of God. He restrains His anger — in wisdom, in mercy. Limited by man's ability of endurance.—*Dr. Lyth.*

17–21. God's anger (pp. 424). I. *Its evidences.* "I hid me," &c. How God hides Himself. II. *Its occasion.* III. *Its removal.* From the penitent, by the Gospel of peace—to all, with the assurance of forgiveness, producing peace in the heart, health in the soul, praise in the lips. IV. *Its perpetuation against the wicked.* 1. Absolutely determined by his moral condition—their hearts are full of evil passions, restless trouble, pollution. 2. And by the sentence of God.—*Dr. Lyth.*

Abounding Sin and Abounding Grace.

lvii. 17–19. *For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, &c.*

The design of the Bible is twofold: first, to reveal man to himself, and, next, to reveal God to him. The Bible contains a revelation of the gracious heart of God, and of the sinful heart of man. Both were necessary, for man is essentially ignorant of himself, and the degree of his distance and separation from God (Prov. xxx. 13; Rev. iii. 17–19). The text is a case in point. It was necessary that the Jews should be rebuked for their rebellion, and that God's mercy should be revealed to them. God condescends to argue the case with them, and to justify His procedure in permitting their captivity and desolation, whilst He gives the promise of their future restoration and recovery to His image and favour.

I. The aboundings of sin on the part of Israel.

By the "iniquity of covetousness" we may perhaps understand their reluctance to uphold the service of God, contrasted by their prodigality and profusion in the service of idols (vers. 5, 6, 9; ch. xliii. 22–24; Hos. ii. 8, 9). But as human nature is always the same, we may trace here the marks of a declining professor.

1. *Their obduracy under Divine chastisement* (Jer. v. 3; Zeph. iii. 2, 5, 7). It argues a strange boldness not to put away sin, when men are suffering under Divine rebukes. It is to refuse the antidote, and let the poison of sin work on. The bond of iniquity must be exceedingly strong, if when the hand of God is upon us, the heart do not relent (Prov. xxiii. 15; 2 Chron. xxviii. 22). We may well pray: "From all hardness of heart," &c. Guard not only against sinful acts, but against a sinful and unsubdued temper of mind (Rev. iii. 19; Ps. xxxii. 9).

2. *Their apathy under the Divine withdrawments.* A good man is anxious to possess the tokens of the Divine favour, &c. The withholding of these is a source of humiliation and sorrow (Ps. li. 12; lxxvii. 1–9). But Israel was full of apathy. Samson was unconscious of the loss he sustained: "He wist not that the Lord had departed."

3. *Their neglect of the kindest appeals and promises of God's mercy.* God had said (vers. 15, 16); yet this awakened no response. There are some whom neither judgments awe, nor mercy subdues.

II. The aboundings of grace on the part of God.

1. *For obduracy here is mercy.* The criminal is arraigned, convicted, condemned, and punishment actually begun; and yet an arrest is placed upon the execution of judgment. When you would expect nothing but actual destruction, you have immediately after the triumph of grace. "Who is a God like Thee?" &c. God hates the sinner's *ways*, but He loves the sinner's *soul*. His grace is able to subdue the evils that nothing else can. He not only pardons but sanctifies.

2. *For desertion here is the promise of guidance.* Christ is the Shepherd of the souls He came to redeem.

3. *For sorrow here is comfort.* When the soul wants peace, it can have none till God speak it.

4. *For despondency here is triumph.* So great was the despondency that the restoration of peace is a miracle! It must be *created!* (ch. lxv. 17, 18).

Conclusion.—The text is a most instructive and encouraging comment on Rom. v. 20. It has been the characteristic of humanity, in all conditions and dispensations, that sin abounded. But the mercy of God has superabounded. The pardoning mercy of the Gospel greatly triumphs over sin, though so greatly aggravated by the light of Divine revelation. It can erase the deepest stains of guilt, and ennoble the nature which sin has degraded and defiled. This abounding grace is offered for *your* acceptance.—*Samuel Thodey.*

Ver. 18. God's tender mercy toward penitent sinners.

Through the cloud of His people's sins God's mercy shines most brightly. Here is unspeakable tenderness, to

melt, to strengthen, and to console. Verily, "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him," &c. (ch. xliii. 25; xlviii. 9, and others).

God's tender mercy toward penitent sinners is here presented in several ways—

I. *He sees them.* This ancient doctrine is at variance with modern popular philosophy, which maintains that God holds Himself too high apart to take cognisance of men on this low earth; that if there is a God at all, He is very distant, and does not condescend to "look upon men" (Job iii. 27, 28). If this is the God of popular philosophy, it is not the God of the Bible (Ps. cxiii. 6; Prov. xv. 3; v. 21; Heb. iv. 13). Present everywhere, He sees all that transpires throughout His vast domains, &c. In this chapter, we read of some of the things that God saw in those of whom He here speaks; scoffing at religion; infatuated by sin; given over to the grossest iniquity; hardened in sin (vers. 4–9, 17). God's compassionate eye is fixed upon *you;* He sees your wanderings, sins, repentance, &c., from His Omniscient outlook, as though you alone of all His children were penitent. As a compassionate parent looks upon his erring penitent child, so God looks upon broken-hearted penitents. His pitying eye sees the contrite spirit and the aching heart, &c. (Ps. ciii. 13; Luke xv. 20; xxii. 61). Ever look upon God as ever looking upon you. Look well to your "ways," cherish the spirit of prayerful watchfulness and self-denial. "Thou God seest me."

II. *He heals them.* Pardons and restores them. Sin is often represented as a painful, loathsome disease, and pardon and salvation as a healing of the disease (ch. vi. 10; xxx. 26; 2 Chron. vii. 14; Jer. iii. 22; viii. 22; xvii. 4; xxxiii. 6; Ps. xli. 3, 4; ciii. 3; cxlvii. 3).

1. *The inimitable character of the Physician.* (1.) *His skill is infinite.* A physician must understand anatomy, disease, symptoms, causes, &c., and he must be skilful to prescribe suitable directions and remedies, &c. The Divine Physician possesses unbounded knowledge of the cause, the progress, and the precise state of the soul's disorders and infirmities, of which bodily diseases are analogous. (See pp. 496.) (2.) *His power is almighty.* No spiritual disease so inveterate and stubborn but He can conquer and cure it with infinite ease. He never turns any away, saying, "I can do no more for you," &c. (3.) *His tenderness and compassion is unspeakable* (ch. xlii. 3; Ps. ciii. 13, 14). (4.) *His patience and diligence is unwearied.* He bears with their ingratitude, &c., pursues His work till He has effected a cure.

2. *The remedy by which He heals.* (1.) *His pardoning and restoring mercy* through the redemption of Christ (ch. liii. 5; Zech. xiii. 1; Rom. iii. 23–26; Rev. v. 9, 12; viii. 14). Announced in the ministry of the Word. Applied by His Spirit (Ezek. xxxvi. 25–27; Heb. x. 16). Received by faith. (2.) *The means of grace* (Eph. iv. 11–13). Designed to promote spiritual health. The Church—the hospital of grace, where the Divine art of healing is carried on, &c.

III. *He leads them.* Not only amends what is amiss in them, that they may cease to do evil; but directs them into the way of duty, that they may learn to do well (Ps. xxiii. 2, 3; lxxiii. 24; and others. See pp. 296). He leads them to the mercy-seat; to His Word; into paths of righteousness, &c.

IV. *He comforts them.* He restores the comforts which they had forfeited and lost, for the return of which the grace of God had prepared them, and for which the pious among them had fervently prayed. They had experienced true and satisfying joy, but they sinned it away—they had lost their peace of mind, their souls were sad and cheerless. Sin always produces this effect. In the path of sin neither hope nor comfort can be found. And when lost, it can be recovered only by penitent faith (Ps. li. 1–12, and others). God graciously restores the comfort of forfeited mercy, lost joy, vanished hope, &c (Ps. xxiii.

3). He removes all false comforts, and then restores true comforts—the comfort of perfect pardon, daily communion, &c.

CONCLUSION.—Some of you are still impenitent—indifferent about spiritual healing, &c. Remember! God sees you always, in all your sinful "ways," and therefore sees that which in righteousness He must abhor, and in pity mourn. As a faithful father mourns because of the continued rebellion of a prodigal, so your heavenly Father mourns over you. Take that into your consideration, and surely you will be reluctant to weary out His patience, &c. "Repent and believe the Gospel," then God shall not see you as sinners He must condemn, but as penitents He must save, and heal, and lead, and comfort (1 John i. 8, 9).—*A. Tucker.*

ASPECTS OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER.

The proper study of man is God. Nothing so tends to expand the mind, and humble the soul, &c. This description of God is worthy our careful consideration. From it we learn—

I. *God is the all-seeing One.* The doctrine of the Divine Omniscience one of the most important. Yet practically ignored. It should—1. Exert a restraining influence. If we realised that God's eye was upon us we should refrain from sin in all its forms and manifestations; like Joseph we should exclaim, "How can I," &c. 2. Encourage the penitent. 3. Stimulate the Christian worker.

II. *God is the great Physician.* Men need healing. Not a hopeless case. Bodily health valuable, spiritual far more precious.

III. *God is the Leader of His people.* They need leading. God graciously offers to be our Guide—all-wise, powerful, faithful, &c. He is leading us to the heavenly habitation, &c. (see p. 296).

IV. *God is the Comforter of His people.* In the world they have tribulation, &c. Therefore need super-human comfort.

CONCLUSION.—"Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace, thereby good shall come to thee."—*A. Tucker.*

THE PEACE OF GOD.

lvii. 19, 20. *Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, &c.*

There was a time when man's religion was the religion of spontaneous innocence: the only religion open to him now is the religion of penitence. This makes the Gospel bear the character of a system of cure. It is not a work of improvement for a nature already good, but a remedy for a nature diseased. It is a healing process. There is one thing all want and seek—peace. The world has said "peace, peace!" and they find that there is "no peace." There are two ways of seeking peace, two promises made to the craving heart, the same in words but opposed in meaning—the world's and Christ's. The world proposes to fulfil her promise by gratifying nature; the Gospel by expelling nature. The world's method is: "Gratify your desires; indulge them." If there were no other world, no conscience, this would be wise and well. The peace which Christ proclaims is different—the healing of a disordered heart; not giving the reins to desires, but mastering them; placing the whole soul under the discipline of the Cross.

In considering the promise which comes from the lips of God, we shall examine two connected subjects contained in these verses.

I. THE STRUGGLE OF AN EARNEST SOUL TOWARDS PEACE.

The first step is made by *treading on the ruins of human pride.* One source of restlessness is an overweening estimate of self. The Gospel crushes that spirit. At the foot of the Cross there is no room for pride. Merit is impossible before God. We are not claimants for reward, only suppliants for life, a life forfeited by guilt. Learn this first how much you deserve on God's earth, and if it should turn out that you deserve nothing and have

received little, then calculate whether you have been defrauded. When we have passed through the first humbling smart of that conviction, content to stand unclothed before God, without one claim except the righteousness of Christ, we have made one step toward peace.

The second step toward peace is *the attainment of a spirit of reconciliation.* If there were nothing else to make men wretched, uncertainty regarding their future destinies would be enough. There is no peace in prospect of eternity, unless there is something more than a guess that God is loving us. This peace is for two classes. 1. For those who have remained through life "*near*" to God. Such are spoken of as the ninety-nine just persons, and are represented by the Elder Son in the parable. Their religious growth has been quiet, regular, steady. Nurtured in religious families, they have imbibed the atmosphere of religion without knowing how, and so they go on loving God, till duty becomes a habit and religion the very element of life. The rapture that comes from pardoned guilt is like the fire-rocket, streaming and blazing; but the peace of him who has lived "near" to God is like the quiet steady lustre of the light-house lamp. 2. This peace is for those who are "*far off*," who have lived long in the alienation of guilt. It seems as if the joy of returning to God had in it something richer than the peace which belongs to consistent obedience. There is the fatted calf, the robe, and the ring. After all, for most of us this is the only Gospel. One here and there has lived near to God from childhood, but the majority of us have lived far enough from Him at some period. We want a Gospel for the guilty. It is not the having been "far off" that makes peace impossible (Rom. v. 1).

The last step toward peace is *the attainment of a spirit of active obedience.* It is not the dread of hell alone that makes men miserable. We cannot be happy except in keeping God's commandments. Make a man sure of heaven, and leave him unhumbled, impure, selfish—he is a wretch still. Disobedience is misery. God's remedy is to write His law on the heart, so that we love Christ, and love what Christ commands.

II. REASONS WHICH EXCLUDE THE GUILTY HEART FROM PEACE. Two are assigned. 1. *The heart's own inward restlessness.* Man's spirit is like a vast ocean. A pond may be without a ripple, but the sea cannot rest. So it is with the soul. 2. *The influences acting on the soul.* The sea rests not because of the attraction of the heavenly bodies. In us there is a tide of feeling (Gal. v. 17). Partly the impossibility of rest arises from outward circumstances. There are winds that sweep the ocean's surface. So with man there are circumstances that fret and discompose. The man who has not peace in himself can never get it from circumstances. Place him where you will he carries an unquiet heart. 3. *The power of memory to recall the past with remorse.* "Its waters cast up mire and dirt." Memory brings to light what has been buried in it, as sea casts up wreck and broken rock. Navies may sink in it, but the planks stranded on the shore tell the tale of shipwreck. So with deeds and thoughts. There are tempests that will bring them up some day. This is the worst torment of the impenitent.

CONCLUSION.—1. *Mark the connection between peace and cure.* Only the blood of Christ can give the sinner peace. 2. *No amount of sin bars the way to peace.—F. W. Robertson, M.A.: The Christian at Work*, Feb. 1881.

I. *The nature of the blessing which is proclaimed in the Gospel:* "Peace, peace." 1. There is war between God and man, but the Gospel proclaims peace. 2. There is war between the higher and lower principles of human nature. Appetite and passion against reason and conscience. A divided heart.

II. *The persons to whom the blessings proclaimed in the Gospel is offered.* "To him that is afar off and to him that is near." 1. In respect of religious

privileges. Gentiles and Jews. 2. In respect of social advantages. Members of worldly and of religious families. 3. In respect of moral character. The profligate and the respectable. 4. In respect of local distance. The field is the world.

III. *The influence of the blessing proclaimed in the Gospel on its recipient.* 1. It is beneficial in its operations. Not hurting, not deadening, not teaching or helping merely. 2. It is individual in its efficiency. 3. It is Divine in its agency.

IV. *The practical issue.* 1. The fruit of the lips is thanksgiving (Heb. xiii. 15). 2. God creates the occasion and the disposition.—*G. Brookes: Outlines*, pp. 143, 144.

The Unhappiness of Sinners.

lvii. 20, 21. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, &c.* (α).

A true picture of that continued state of restlessness, uncertainty, and apprehension in which the wicked are held daily by the terrors of an alarmed conscience; or even by the distrust and anxiety they are doomed to experience in the very midst of their fancied freedom and enjoyments! Whoever has looked upon the ocean when tossed by storm and tempest, must acknowledge that the prophet could have selected no better comparison to depict to the life the state of a sinner's spirit.

I. The sea cannot, if it would, sink to repose, but is doomed to heave wave after wave uselessly to the shore, till the mind of the spectator is oppressed with a sense of weariness, and almost sorrow for such incessant and fruitless tossings. Such, exactly, is the state of the sinner's mind; it cannot rest. With the stain of unrepented sin on the conscience, the mind can enjoy no peace, can taste no rational pleasure (β).

II. The sinner, in his impurity, is like the troubled sea, "whose waters cast up mire and dirt." As in a tempest the waves of the ocean fling nothing but foam and weed and refuse to the shore, so the mind of the sinner is productive of nothing but polluted thoughts and corrupted actions, as worthless as the mire and clay left behind it by the retiring storm. This is of all others the greatest evil that sin brings with it. By *it* true happiness of soul and nobleness of life are rendered impossible. It is only when the stain of sin has been blotted out by faith, and the feelings of the heart purified by grace continually sought for in fervent prayer, that the peace of God reigns in the heart, and the fruits of peace show themselves in the life and practice.

III. Several things render the sinner unhappy even in this life. Not only shall he have no peace hereafter, but he has no peace here and now. "There *is* no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

1. *The wicked have no real comfort of mind from the pleasures of this world.* (1.) Nothing can afford us any real or lasting pleasures except so far as it can be enjoyed innocently and with a good conscience. The indulgence of disordered passion may, indeed, sometimes give a momentary delight; but it is always followed, on reflection, by the pangs of remorse and sorrow. (2.) Even those delights which are pure and innocent the sinner enjoyeth not like other men; for his taste is too much corrupted and deadened by the intoxicating draughts of sin to relish the simple pleasures of innocence and virtue.

2. *The wicked must necessarily want all effectual support under the many evils and calamities of life.* In the time of affliction, what a contrast there is between the faithful Christian and the sinner. What the Christian can say (Ps. lvii. 1; 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18). But when the storm overtakes the sinner, it finds him naked and exposed to its influence, without one single prospect of succour or of safety. He cannot

retire within himself, and derive comfort in his adversity from the uprightness of his conduct and the purity of his intentions, for these never have had a place in his bosom; he cannot look back with pleasure on the past, and he dare not look forward to the future. Moreover, the world feels no pity for the unfortunate sinner, and his own companions in guilt will be the first to shun and the last to succour him.

3. *The wicked are troubled perpetually with the reproofs of conscience, and unwelcome thoughts of death.—R. Parkinson, B.D.: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 148–158.

(α) See pp. 318, 319.

(β) H. E. I. 1331, 1332, 1334–1341; P. D. 560, 562, 569, 572.

I. In illustrating these declarations we are not required to maintain that the life of wicked men is one of pure and unqualified wretchedness; common experience would be against us, and such is not the meaning of our text. We may admit, in perfect conformity with Isaiah's views, that the persons here mentioned are very often possessed of many worldly blessings, and have much apparent enjoyment (Ps. xxxv. 15, &c.; H. E. I. 5045–5047). Yea, they are capable of deriving certain comforts from these outward benefits, and would sometimes be surprised if you told them that they were altogether strangers to peace. It is difficult to suppose that wealth, power, and distinction, although the portion of worldly and wicked men, convey to them *no* satisfaction. And especially if we contemplate that large class who spend their time amidst worldly amusements and dissipations—is there *no* comfort here? Is it possible that these buoyant and lively spirits are a prey to inward vexation? Can it be supposed that the thoughtless, the cheerful, and the gay, who seem to be far remote from anxiety and care, are, at the very moment, *miserable?* Must we suppose that even the sensual, who work all uncleanness with greediness, really do not find even any sordid pleasure in their pursuits? We need not make any statements so strong and unqualified. Nor, whatever be the alleged gratification that such persons can have, and whatever be their exemption, at any stated period, from harassing anxiety, it is not *peace* (α). The only condition which answers to the word peace is totally distinct both from the animal spirits, which are sometimes mistaken for it, and from the insensibility which marks the practised and daring sinner. True peace must be something essentially distinct from the changing objects of time and sense; it must be something which includes the freedom of the mind from just apprehensions of evil, and which breathes over the soul a calm which the world cannot take away. Now, there is nothing which can do this but the peace made known and offered to us by the Gospel (John xiv. 27; Rom. xiv. 17).

Where there is no reconciliation with God, this peace cannot exist. The wicked, therefore, have it not; on the contrary, they "are like the troubled sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt." There may sometimes be a calm over the face of the deep, but it is not of long continuance; and the time comes when we observe the sea in commotion: no longer hushed in repose and presenting the stillness and clearness of a placid lake, but working up from its depths the sediment which is there deposited, and mingling it, even to the surface, with its waves. Such is the just and accurate image to represent the real state of mind of the wicked. Making all due allowance for the different natural dispositions of men, we see this to be generally the case with them. While all is cheerfulness and gaiety around them, while nothing occurs to interfere with their worldly pleasures, or the indulgence of their depraved minds, there is the apparent quiet and repose of the unruffled ocean: but let the soothing influence be removed, let the object of their gratifications and pursuits desert them, nay, let them be followed only to their own chamber and left to the solitude of their own thoughts, and how little have they of rest!

II. Why is there no peace to the wicked? Several reasons. 1. *The unsuitableness of any earthly things to satisfy the soul.* God created man in His own image; and although that image has been defaced, it is not absolutely destroyed; the temple which God created has not been ploughed up from the foundation; although a ruin, it is still a splendid ruin. The soul no longer possesses those elevated and lofty views and desires which distinguished it before the fall; but there is still in us a *desire* for something which this world cannot supply. Give to a man all that his heart can wish for of things visible: it will be found that the spirit is not *satisfied.* If we would give peace to the soul, we must have recourse to something better than the world with all its promises, and more suited to afford solid gratification than wickedness in all its branches (H. E. I. 4969–4974, 5006–5025).

2. *The corrupt influence of depraved appetites and ungoverned passions.* The terrible results of this influence will be obvious to any one who will observe the wicked, the perpetual outbreaking of their bad passions, and the misery thus inflicted on them (H. E. I. 4955).

3. *An unpacified conscience.* This troubles them in their solitude even in the days of their health; but how terrible is the distress it causes when death seems at hand.

CONCLUSION.—1. The folly of continuing in any known sin. No man would willingly and avowedly pursue a course which *must* involve him in misery. Why, then, is it that men persist in transgression? 2. How conducive to our happiness, even in this life, must be

the spirit of true religion in the heart—reconciliation with God; peace of conscience; the peace which Christ can give. 3. What cause have we for gratitude to God, that He has provided a way of reconciliation even for the chief of sinners!—*W. Dealtry, D.D., F.R.S.: Sermons*, pp. 281–297.

Words have different meanings on different lips. "A rich man"—a farmer's wife will so describe a man on whom a Baring or a Rothschild looks down as poor. To God and His inspired prophets "peace" has a loftier significance than it has to us, when uninstructed by them. *Their* peace means a condition of the heart arising from the harmony of the heart with God. A great work has been accomplished in any heart in which there is this peace. Its source is invisible, its results supernatural. The world does not give it; the world cannot take it away. It is independent of circumstances. Those who possess it are conscious of it when resting in the pleasant shade around which falls the pleasant sunshine of a summer day, and also when tossed to and fro at midnight on a stormy ocean. Christ, who gives it, had it when the cross was full in view: it was when He was on His way to torture and death that He bequeathed it to His disciples (John xiv. 27).

If we forget what "peace" means in Scripture, we shall be disposed to regard this Scripture declaration as inaccurate, as exaggerated. Great was Asaph's distress when he forgot it (Ps. lxxiii. 2–4). In the world there are many counterfeits of peace on which our observation is apt to rest. These counterfeits of peace prevail: nevertheless to the wicked there is no peace. What they imagine is peace is like the smoothness of the ocean on a summer evening: there is in it no stability. The wicked man, after all, is "like the troubled sea."

I. **He cannot rest.** That is true of the sea, and it is just as true of the sinner, for there are mighty winds from which he cannot long escape. 1. *The wind of an accusing conscience.* No opiate will consign conscience to an endless slumber; no gag will keep it always silent. There are times when it will escape, and the work it does then is like the work done by a hurricane on the ocean. In solitude, in the sleepless midnight hours, in the season of sickness, the wicked man feels himself helpless before it. 2. *The wind of approaching death*, for which the wicked man feels he is not ready (P. D. 684). 3. *The wind of judgment beyond death.* In health, he scoffed at the thought of it as a silly superstitious delusion; but when he feels the chill hand of death is upon him, where is his "peace"?

These mighty winds render it impossible for the wicked man to rest. They expose the worthlessness of the counterfeits in which for a little while he rejoices.

II. **He cannot permanently conceal the foulness that is within him.** When the storm strikes the sea, "its waters cast up mire and dirt;" it is seen that they are not throughout as pellucid as on a quiet summer evening they seem. Their charm is merely superficial. On the wicked man, likewise, forces are exerted which show what is in him. For a time there may be a fair outward appearance, that deceives himself and others; but ere long it is dispersed by such things as these—1. *The fierce gale of sensual passion.* What scandals shock society every day! What surprise is felt! And yet how unreasonable is the surprise! The temptation only showed what was *in* the man. 2. *The fierce gale of disappointed ambition.* What falsehood, meanness, cruelty, appears in men who are being deposed or hurled from power! With what base weapon they seek to defend themselves, and to retain their position! 3. *The fierce gale of pecuniary necessity.* There are in jail to-day men whose word a year ago was considered "as good as their bond;" but there never was in them real honesty. All these things show what is in the wicked; that beneath the surface, yea, to the very depths of their being, there is foulness.

CONCLUSION.—1. Let us not envy the wicked in their time of success and serenity (Ps. xxxvii. 34–37; H. E. I.

4943–4948, 4955–4966). 2. Let us seek the true peace and the permanent serenity we need where alone it can be found. 3. Let us have Divine compassion for the wicked.—*R. A.*, 73.

The Hypocrite Unmasked.

lviii. 1–5. *Cry aloud, spare not, &c.*

The history of nations is pre-eminently the history of God's providential government of the world. The special charge laid at the door of Israel in our text is that of hypocrisy: a malady from which many a modern temple-worshipper is suffering. Indeed there is the tendency of it to be found lurking in the nature of us all. Consider—

I. **The false professions with which the Israelites are charged.** 1. An apparent diligence in the search after truth and justice. 2. They appeared to be regular and punctual in their observance of the ordinances of religion. Often secondary motives prompt to a religious profession and to attendance at the house of God. It is considered fashionable and respectable to keep the Sabbath and to be present at the sanctuary at least once on the Lord's Day. Besides, it is pleasing to our friends, &c. If these are your only motives to a religious profession, they are unworthy, and will not stand the lightning glance of Him who is the searcher of all hearts. This will help us to account for the apparent lapses and so-called backslidings of professing Christians. Learn the vital difference between a spurious and a genuine piety. 3. Look also at the *spirit* in which their sacrifices were made. 4. Evidently some of them were possessed of a strong desire to maintain the standard of orthodoxy (ver. 4; 1 Cor. i.). To-day the olden spirit of strife and sectarian jealousy still stalks through Christendom, and there is the same smiting at any rate with the mental fist that we find in the dark days of old. How is it with ourselves? What is the great object of all our self-sacrifice and labour? Is it merely to bolster up our own little sect or Church, &c. 5. The spirit of mock humility in which the Israelites indulged (ver. 5). Custom of the East; the humiliation was feigned (Job. viii. 12). Such are some of the false professions with which the Israelites are here charged.

II. **The vehement rebuke with which, because of their false professions, they are visited** (ver. 1; Ezek. xxxiii. 3). It is possible for God's people even to harbour in their midst the accursed thing which God hateth. And although we are sometimes slow to detect and confess the lurking evil, which like a worm is gnawing the root of our piety, and sapping the very fount of our spiritual life; yet God detects it, and it must be put away if we would still be accepted of Him.

Conclusion. — If your character answers at all to that of Israel, suffer the word of honest rebuke. Of all hateful things in God's sight, hypocrisy is the chief.—*J. W. Atkinson: The Penny Pulpit*, New Series, No. 882.

Unsparing Reproof.

lviii. 1. *Cry aloud and spare not, &c.*

Faithful dealing always objected to: called fault-finding, indulging in personalities, &c. The old cry is still heard, "Prophesy unto us smooth things." O for the prayer (Ps. cxxxix. 23).

I. Israel's Sinfulness. A whole catalogue of sins (ch. lvi. 10–12; lvii. 5; lix.). In the face of these appalling sins and fiendish cruelties and wrongs, they profess themselves saints (ver. 2). The sham and hypocrisy of all this is emphasised by the word "yet," which strikes a contrast between their religiousness and their sins, and declares their religiousness a sham (ver. 5; lvii. 12).

What a striking parallel between the

state of Israel then and of England now.

1. We pose as a righteous nation! Yet *look at our national sins.* (1.) Social wrongs, greed of place and wealth, so that the state to which the needy has been reduced has been declared to be one in which "we sit on a volcano." (2.) Social impurity, with its abounding immorality and fiendish crime. (3.) Murder as a trade. It may be slow, but sure; and, as in Israel's case, it is the slaying of children! (4.) Intemperance. It is computed that we have 800,000 drunkards, and that for every £1 we spend on Christian missions, we spend £130 in drink! (5.) Idolatry. Everything being sacrificed to worldliness, fashion, custom, public opinion, &c. No nation sins with more determined step, or with more brazen face!

2. Not only is our national religiousness deceptive, but *there is also very much that is sham in the Churches of our land.* Formalism, cant, rant, self-delusion. Many seem to be righteous, and think they delight in religious duties, &c. What wilful blinking of the truth! What religiousness without religion! No wonder that to many religion is a synonym for sham—keenly noticed by the worldly, and a grievous hindrance to those who would join God's people, &c.

II. ISRAEL REPROVED.—Israel's sins must be reproved plainly, earnestly, faithfully, fearlessly, and publicly. So with us to-day.

1. *Sin must be reproved plainly.* Show transgressions and sins—point them out, show how they abound, &c. Some say "No," you only make it worse; you emphasise sins, quicken the imaginations, and fire the heart with it. So in the Church. Some harm, but much good. Must reprove with Bible-plainness—call by right names; with Bible-clearness—speak of awful consequences. Examples: Elijah, John the Baptist, Christ, Luther, John Knox, Wesley, &c. 2. *Faithfully.* Spare not. Some object that we hurt the feelings, offend, frighten, &c. But we must not spare high or low, &c.; we must probe deep, wound, fill with anguish, &c. 3. *Earnestly.* "Cry aloud." Let men feel that every Christian feels it his commission to reprove sin, &c. *Fearlessly.* Regard no consequences. Be not timid, hesitating, daunted, for such reprovers never give conviction. 5. *Publicly.* Like a trumpet of proclamation, loud and authoritative, that the sound of the reproof may be deep and stirring; go far and wide, and create and sustain public opinion in reference to these sins. There is much apparent boldness around us, but alas! how much shirking of the solemn duty. 6. *In the true prophetic spirit.* Under the burden of souls as David (Ps. cxix. 53, 136); Jeremiah; Christ weeping over Jerusalem; Paul, &c. In the spirit of wisdom and power (Micah iii. 8). We must catch the mantle of Elijah! We must possess the tongue of the Baptist! In the spirit of saving grace (Isa. lxi. 3). Not only all preachers of the Word, but Sunday-school teachers, tract distributors, fathers and mothers—all must "cry aloud," &c.

The gracious conclusion God makes to this matter (ch. lviii. 6–12; lxix. 1, 55). Spoken to the same people, and by the same God. Spoken to us as well. The painfulness of the probing of Divine truth is only to prepare for the removal of sin, and the pouring in of healing balm. "Let us search our ways," &c. "Return to the Lord," &c. (Lam. iii. 40).—*D. A. Hay.*

FORMALISM.

lviii. 2. *Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, &c.*

One of the most wicked things that Machiavel ever said was this: "Religion itself should not be cared for, but only the appearance of it; the credit of it is a help; the reality and use is a cumber." Such notions are from beneath; they smell of the pit; for if there is anything about which the Scripture speaks expressly, it is the sin and uselessness of mere formalism.

The Jews were especially liable to this evil. They so rested in the outward observances of the law as to lose its spirit. They were indifferent to the practical forms of godliness, without which religion is but a name and a form. In this chapter we read that they sought God, &c.; and all the time there were grievous sins which they were living in the daily practice of, and of which they were content to be ignorant. As a consequence, they were without the special manifestation of the Divine favour, and were ever ready to upbraid God for unfaithfulness. But God requires "truth in the inward parts." The passage suggests—

I. THE RATIONALE OF FORMALISM.

A form of religion includes—

1. *Theoretical religious knowledge.* Attach high importance to a well-digested system of truth, but remember you may subscribe to every article of the Christian faith with a sincere and hearty ascent, and yet be destitute of spiritual religion, &c. A creed however scriptural is not vital religion.

2. *The practice of moral duties.* These are not to be disparaged, but morality is not the love of God.

3. *Frequent attendance on religious ordinances.* Very devout and regular, earnest in self-sacrifices, fastings, and self-mortifications (vers. 1–7). It is the very essence of formalism to set the outward institution above the inward truths, to be punctilious in going the round of ceremonial observances while neglectful of those spiritual sacrifices with which God is well pleased—to substitute means in the room of ends (*a*). It is much easier to observe the forms of religion, than it is to bring the heart under its all-controlling influence (ch. i. 10–15; Ezek. xxxiii. 30–33; Matt. xv. 8).

4. *Membership in the Church.* In the Church, but not "in Christ." The day is coming when union with the Church will not be worth the paper on which it is written, if there is no real spiritual union with Christ.

5. *Party zeal and external philanthropy.* The piety of Israel at this time seems to have been anything but inactive: it was very busy. Indeed it would seem that they were divided into religious parties or factions, some professing to be more orthodox than others. There was a rivalry, therefore, in their devotion; one tried to excel the other, and the competition ran so high that they began to "smite each other with the fist." Formalism is ever full of denominational zeal. Much is said, and done, and given for man in this age of philanthropy, in the spirit of partisanship.

6. *Sanctimonious solemnity* (ver. 5). If men are in deep sorrow it is natural for them to droop their heads. In the east men wore sackcloth, as we do crape, to indicate their grief. But with the formalist all this is pretence—theatrical sadness and gloom. True religion is joy-inspiring, and ever manifests itself in cheerfulness and sunshine. But the mere formalist cannot be happy, hence he robes himself in garbs of sadness, and produces the impression that religion is characteristically grave, &c. Such sanctimoniousness has done untold damage.

What is the character of *your* religion? Is it formal or spiritual, conventional or Christly — *form or heart?*

II. THE DEFICIENCIES OF FORMALISM.

1. *It tends to form and foster intolerance.* "The people of the Lord, the people of the Lord are we." In the name of religion men have committed and still commit some of the greatest enormities on which the sun ever shone.

2. *It fails to yield the solid happiness found in spiritual religion.* It is impossible in the nature of things. True religion is an inward principle (1 Sam. xvi. 7; Rom. ii. 28; 1 Cor. vii. 19; Gal. v. 6; vi. 15). A painted fire cannot warm, a painted banquet cannot satisfy hunger, and a formal religion cannot bring peace to the soul.

3. *It is directly opposed to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel.*

4. *It is injurious to its possessor and to others* (ver. 1). It warps the judgment, it deadens the conscience, it

hardens the heart, it awakens false hopes, and it will put to shame at the last day. Its influence upon others is most pernicious and destructive. It misrepresents religion, &c. Let every minister cry aloud, spare not, lift up his voice like a "trumpet" against this common foe, this bane of Christendom.

5. It is an insult to Almighty God. If this formalism were so odious to God under the law—a religion full of ceremonies, certainly it will be much more odious under the Gospel—a religion of much more simplicity, and requiring so much the greater sincerity (Ezek. xxxiii. 21; Matt. xv. 8, and others). He peers into the heart, He sees the sham, and abhors the sacrifice, where the heart is not found.—*A. Tucker.*

(a) The tendency to turn Christianity into a religion of ceremonial is running with an unusually powerful current to-day. We are all more interested in art, and think that we know more about it than our fathers did. The eye and the ear are more educated than they used to be, and a society as "æsthetic" and "musical," as much English society is becoming, will like an ornate ritual. So, apart altogether from doctrinal grounds, much in the condition of to-day works towards ritual and religion. Nonconformist services are less plain; some go from their ranks because they dislike the "bald" worship in the chapel, and prefer the more elaborate forms of the Anglican Church, which in its turn is for the same reason left by others who find their tastes gratified by the complete thing, as it is to be enjoyed full-blown in the Roman Catholic communion. We freely admit that the Puritan reaction was possibly too severe, and that a little more colour and form might with advantage have been retained. *But enlisting the senses as the allies of the spirit in worship is risky work.* They are very apt to fight for their own hand when they once begin, and the history of all symbolic and ceremonial worship shows that the experiment is much more likely to end in sensualising religion than in spiritualising sense. The theory that such aids make a ladder by which the soul may ascend to God is perilously apt to be confuted by experience, which finds that the soul never gets above the steps of the ladder. The gratification of taste, and the excitation of æsthetic sensibility, which is the result of such aids to worship, is not worship, however it may be mistaken as such. All ceremonial is in danger of becoming opaque instead of becoming transparent, as it was meant to be, and of detaining mind and eye instead of letting them pass on and up to God. Stained glass is lovely, and white windows are "barn-like," and "starved," and "bare;" but perhaps, if the object is to get light and to see the sun, these solemn purples and glowing yellows are rather in the way. I, for my part, believe that of the two extremes a Quakers' meeting is nearer the ideal of Christian worship than High Mass; and so far as my feeble voice can reach, I would urge as eminently a lesson for the day Paul's great principle, that a Christianity making much of forms and ceremonies is a distinct retrogression and a distinct descent. You are men in Christ; do not go back to the picture-book A B C of symbol and ceremony, which was fit for babes. You have been brought into the inner sanctuary of worship in spirit; do not decline to the beggarly elements of outward forms.—*Dr. Maclaren, in "Expositor."*

Periodical Fasts.

lviii. 4. *Ye shall not fast as ye do this day.*

Periodical fasts, such as the Ritualists would have us keep in Lent, instead of being well pleasing in the sight of God, are offensive to Him.

I. They are based upon a false conception of the character of God. Their promoters say: "This is to be a season of special religiousness; therefore it is to be a time of mortification, fasting, and gloom. This is a season in which to do special honour to God; therefore let His altars and priests be clad in sad vestments, and let His people weep and lament." This view makes God find a pleasure in the self-inflicted grievance of His creatures. It implies that blessings which He has lavishly scattered around us are given rather as tests of our faith and self-denial; that they are here, not for us to rejoice in the works of His hands, but by renouncing them to show our love and loyalty to Him. How is such a view at all reconcilable with the love of the Divine Father? Is it thus that we should deal with our children? Is it credible that any parent, of true and loving heart, would take a studious son into a library of books, every one of which were calling to him to come and enrich himself on its trea-

sures; or a child with rich and cultured musical gifts into a room where were exquisite instruments from which he longed to draw forth strains of sweet melody; or a daughter with a passionate love of flowers into a garden which was one blaze of beauty, and then say, "These are yours; but you will please me best if you do not gratify the desire which would lead you to use them? It is not that you would thus impoverish me, for I could easily supply the place of any you might appropriate; but it will please me if you look at them, long for them, and yet abstain from them. I know it will be a great trial; I have little doubt it will make you miserable; but it is that which will please me." No father, worthy of the name, would be guilty of such heartlessness. Yet it is just this which men ascribe to God, when they fancy that He is pleased if we afflict our souls, bow down our head like a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes under us.

II. THEY ARE BASED UPON, AND PROMOTE FALSE VIEWS OF HUMAN DUTY. 1. *Their evident tendency is to encourage the old notion of the sinfulness of the material world, the body, and all by which it is nourished and refreshed.* It is true that in the New Testament "the flesh" is represented as the natural and deadly foe of the spirit; but "the flesh" denotes not the bodily nature, but the passions and lusts of an unrenewed heart. No doubt these are inflamed by the bodily senses; and if a man finds that fasting helps him to subdue them, let him fast. But to fast under the idea that the body is sinful, and that the more we can mortify it the better—to fast at the cost of physical health and energy is something more than a mistake; it is a sin to sacrifice that health which is one of God's most precious gifts, and which is so essential to enable us to do the service in the world which He requires at our hands. 2. *They lead to a substitution of an outward and bodily for an inward and spiritual service.* Bodily fasting is put in the place of that spirit of moderation, self-conquest, and self-sacrifice, which the prophet describes as the true fast. To their selfishness, passion, and worldly pride, the misguided religionists add the pride of self-righteousness, and so their last state is worse than the first. Let us use all aids which can advance us in likeness to Christ, and remember that all religious services which have not this result, whatever else they may have to recommend them, are but as "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbol."—*J. G. Rogers, B.A.: Christian World Pulpit*, ii. 145–148.

A PLEA FOR THE DISTRESSED.

lviii. 6, 7. *Is not this the fast that I have chosen? &c.*

In the former verses of this chapter we have a description of the state of heart of the Jewish people in the course of their mysterious preparation for destruction. . . . They are in a condition of all others the most appalling—the condition of the self-deceived (ver. 2, &c.). The Lord therefore defines in His own vindication what is the sort of humiliation which alone He will accept and honour. There is no contradiction here of the doctrine that is taught in other passages of Scripture, in which the fast is divinely decreed, and the solemn assembly ordered by Divine command. There are occasions which justify, nay, which even require, national prostration and sorrow; and there is no subliner spectacle than the spectacle of a great people moved as by one common impulse to penitence and prayer. But in the case before us there was both a lie in the mouth and a reserve in the consecration; there was self-righteous satisfaction in the act, and there was a dependence upon it for the recompense of the reward. There is nothing new in the occasion which has brought us together. We meet under the shadow of a great calamity. There is something in the magnitude of the calamity for which we plead which removes it altogether out of the routine of ordinary charity. . . . Only once in a lifetime is it possible that such a crisis as this will occur. It is the cry of thousands stricken with the blight of famine from no fault of their own, &c. The present, therefore, is an occasion of national calamity and concern and sympathy; and they especially who have learned at the feet of Jesus are bound to be helpful in their measure, in order that their good may not be evil spoken of, and in order that their religion, in its very comeliest development, may shine forth before the observation of men.

The one point I want especially, without any

sort of formal or elaborate treatment, to impress upon you now, is the point which lurks in the last verse of the text; there is my claim —"from thine own flesh."

God has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell upon the face of the whole earth. This is the announcement of a grand fact which has never yet been successfully disproved—the essential underlying identity of the human race, however chequered by the varieties of clime and of language—one deep, constant, ineradicable identity which links man to man all over the world. The old Roman could say, "I am a man: nothing, therefore, that is human can be foreign to me." And Christianity takes that sentiment and exalts it into a surpassing obligation, and stamps upon it the royal seal of heaven. Of course this general law must be modified by minor and smaller varieties, or it will be practically useless. The sympathy that goes out after the world gets lost in the magnitude of the area over which it has to travel; and the very vastness and vagueness of the object will of itself tend to fritter away the intenseness of the feeling. That is a very suspicious attachment which clings to nobody in particular, which rejoices no heart with its affection, which brightens no hearthstone by its light. Hence private affections are recognised and hallowed and commended as the sources from which all public virtues are to spring. There is nothing in them inconsistent with the love of the entire race; they prepare for it, and they lead to it, and they scoop out the channels through which its tributaries are to flow. Who shall sympathise so well with the oppressed people as the man who rejoices in his own roof-tree sacred, and in his own altar-home? &c. Now, these two obligations—the claim of private affection and the claim of universal sympathy—are not incompatible; but they fulfil mutually the highest uses of each other. God has taught in the Scripture the lesson of universal brotherhood, and men may not gainsay the teaching. I cannot love all men equally; my own instincts, and society's requirements, and God's commands, all unite in reprobation of that. My wealth of affection must go out after home, and friends, and children, and kindred, and country; but my pity must not lock itself in them; my regard must not confine itself within those narrow limits merely; my pity must go out farther. Wherever there is human need, and human peril, my regard must fasten upon the man, although he may have flung from him the crown of his manhood in anger. I dare not despise him, because, in his filth and in his sin, as he lies before me prostrate and dishonoured, there is that spark of heavenly flame which God the Father kindled, over which God the Spirit yearns with intensest yearning, and which God the Eternal Son spilt His own heart's blood to redeem. There is no man now that can ask the infidel question of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God has made man his brother's keeper; we are to love our neighbours as ourselves; and if, in the contractedness of some narrow Hebrew spirit, we ask the question, "Who is my neighbour?" there comes the full pressure of utterance to enforce, and to authenticate the answer, "Man is thy neighbour; every one whom penury has rasped or sorrow startled—every one whom plague hath smitten or the curse hath banned—every one from whose home the dearlings have vanished, or around whose heart the pall has been drawn" (P. D. 2387).

I observe further that, as it is now, so in every age since the earliest, there have been distinctions of society in the world. It must be so in the nature of things; it is part of God's benevolent allotment, as well as part of God's original economy. A level creation, if you ever come upon it, is not the creation of God, &c. And so it is in society. It is of necessity a union of unequals; there could be no mutual cohesion, or mutual dependence, if we were one perpetual level. God has never made it so; in the nature of things, it could never continue so; and if by the frenzy of some revolutionary deluge all the world were submerged into one level of waters to-day, you may be sure that some aspiring mountain tops would come struggling through the billows to-morrow. It must be so; it is perfectly impossible, in accordance with God's known laws, and in accordance with the nature of things, that there should be equality of society in the world. "*God* hath set the poor in his place," as well as the rich, for He has said expressly, "He that despiseth the poor reproacheth"—not him, but—"his Maker." And the announcement of the Saviour, "The poor ye have always with you," is not only the averment of a fact, but it is a commendation of them, as Christ's clients, to the succour and to the help of His Church. This benevolence, moreover, is claimed for them, specially enjoined on their behalf, because of their abiding existence as a class of the community (Deut. xv. 11). Hence the Saviour has especially commended them unto those who bear His name and who feel His affection shed abroad within their hearts, and He has commended them by the tenderest of all possible ties—"Inasmuch," &c. And, moreover, the class from which the poor is composed will always be the largest class in society—must be so. The poor compose the army, gather the harvest, plough the waters, construct and work the machinery, and are the stalwart purveyors for all the necessity and comfort of life. Who shall say that they have not a claim upon the resources of the state they serve—aye, and in seasons of special need and in special emergency, upon the charity and upon the justice of the many who are enriched by their toil? Once recognise the relationship, and the claim inevitably follows. A sense of service rendered, and of obligation thereby, will deepen that claim into a closer and closer compass; and religion, attaching to it her holiest sanctions, lifts the recognition of the

claim into a duty which the Christian cannot violate without sin. "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." "Whosoever seeth his brother in need," &c. Nay, as I said before—and I return to it because no appeal can be so inimitable in its tenderness and so omnipotent in its power—Christ Himself, once poor in the travail of His own incarnate life, and touched therefore with the feeling of their infirmities, adopts them as His own peculiar care, and, pointing to them as they shiver in rags or perish with hunger, gives them to the care of His Church, that they may be warmed and fed, pronouncing at the same time the benediction which in itself is heaven, "Inasmuch," &c.

I just want to remind you for a moment or two of some of the peculiar circumstances which make this claim more pressing in connection with the liberality of the Churches now. You may meditate, if you please, for a moment upon some of the circumstances of the poor man's lot, in order to enforce the appeal which Scripture and which reason unite to announce and to commend. I might remind you, for example, of the nature of the occupation in which so many are obliged to pass their lives. Their life is for the most part one dreary monotony of labour. His condition is like that of a traveller in the desert, going on and on through the stifling and interminable sand, with hardly an oasis breaking the wilderness, with hardly an Elim in which to quench his thirst. Day after day, through a cheerless round of drudging duties, must the poor man go—constantly the same—the mouth always demanding the labour of the hands. The family grow up around him, and the children are clamorous for bread. The task must be performed. Ceaselessly the wheel goes round. A strange failing comes upon the heart, but he must work; the lion limbs lose their suppleness, but he must work; the eyes get dim and troubled with a confusion of age, but he must work—until at last, perhaps, a strange paralysis seizes him, and he reels and dies, leaving his wife to the cold buffetings of the world, and his children to the stranger's charity, or perhaps to an early and a welcome grave. And then I might remind you of the circumscriptions of the poor from many of the sources of human enjoyment. They do not start fairly with their fellows in the world of intellectual acquirement. To them the sciences are sealed. Rarely can they kindle before a great picture, or travel to a sunny landscape, or be thrilled beneath the spell of an orator's mighty words. Not to them are the pleasures of sense—the ample board, the convenient dwelling, the gathered friends, and all the appearances of comfort, with which wealth has carpeted its own pathway to the tomb. Theirs is a perpetual struggle between the winner and the spender, and unless they are blest at home, and happy in the consolations of religion, life will be to them a joyless birth—a weariness that ceases not; or if their does come a brief respite, it will be one that gives no leisure for love or hope, but only time for tears. Then I would remind you, too, of the pressure with which ordinary evils—evils to which we are all liable—fall upon the circumstances of the poor. There is no part of the world where the curse has not penetrated. Man is born to trouble everywhere, but all these common ills of life fall with heavier penalties upon the poor. They have to bear the penalties in their condition as well as in their experience. They cannot purchase the skill of many healers, the comforts which soothe the sickness, the delicacies which restore the health; and when the wasting sickness seizes them, they have no time to recover thoroughly. And then the maintenance of the poor—the bare maintenance—depends often upon contingencies which he can neither foresee nor control. If labour fails, bread fails, and homes fail. The more provident and thrifty may struggle against the coming calamity for a while, and live upon the results of their thrift and their care; but you can trace, as you may this day if that famine is protracted, the inevitable progress downwards. One by one the comforts are obliged to be parted with, until there is extremity of desolation. And then that is not all. The sickness comes. The fever follows hard upon the famine; through the noisome court the hot blast sweeps, and the pure air flees away at his presence. Comfort has gone; strength has gone; hope has gone. Death has nothing to do but take possession. And this is no fancy; it is no picture. There are thousands of the homes of your fellows—of "your own flesh," where this ruin is enacting to-day. And then I might remind you again, of the temptations which come especially and more fiercely in connection with the poor man's lot. The poor man must struggle for quiescence when he sees that the crumbs "from the rich man's table" wasted, would furnish him not only with a meal but with a banquet. The poor man must have a stern fight to be contented when he sees, striving all his life as he does to be honest, that he is splashed with the mud from the carriage where fraud and profligacy ride. Hence it is that in times of distress, in times of discontentment, grievances are multiplied; there is a cry that is difficult to repress against those above them; they are denounced as selfish, tyrannical, proud. What more shall I say? It remains now surely that you address yourselves to the duty. Your pity, your philanthropy, your patriotism, and your religion have opportunities of charity to-day which they have very rarely had before. Let that charity flow as it ought—undiminished by any solitary misgiving, waiting to settle apparent discrepancies, or to rail at apparent apathy, or to solve economical problems—waiting to do all that until the famine is driven off from the heart of the hungry, and until the stricken and sorrowful can again look up and smile. The duty is one from which none are exempt. God forbid that it should be an offering of the

rich alone! Desolate homes, starving children, patient women from whose hollow eyes the worm looks out already, men smitten from their manhood into feebleness until they have lost almost all remembrance of the bold and brave beings they were—these are our clients. "Inasmuch," &c.—that is our never-failing argument. "Ye know the grace," &c.—that is our example. "She hath done what she could"—that is our measure. "Light breaking forth as the morning, health springing forth speedily, righteousness going before you, the glory of the Lord your reward, light rising in obscurity, darkness as the noonday, the satisfaction of the soul in drought, the land like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters fail not,"—there, Divinely spoken, is our "exceeding great reward."—*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.* (*in aid of the Fund for the Relief of the Lancashire Distress*): *Sermons.*

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lviii. 7, 10, 11. BENEVOLENCE.

I. Is a Christian duty. II. Has its seat in the soul. Is the expression of the soul. Finds its demonstration in practical fruits. III. Must be associated with humility. IV. Is specially acceptable to God. V. Its reward. Light in the soul—on the path—on the condition (vers. 8–12).—*Dr. Lyth.*

A HEALTHY CHURCH.

lviii. 8. *And thine health shall spring forth speedily.*

I. ESSENTIALS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH.

1. *A scriptural constitution.* As Noah built the ark, Moses the tabernacle, and Solomon the temple, according to the Divine instructions; so a healthy church is formed according to the teaching of the New Testament and pattern of the churches planted by the apostles. The foundation must be well laid, otherwise the superstructure cannot but fall. 2. *Nutritious food.* As the body requires to be fed with a sufficient amount of wholesome food, so the soul must be fed with the bread which came down from heaven. Truth in its purity, without any adulteration, should be the soul's spiritual diet (1 Pet. ii. 2). 3. *Pure air.* The man who breathes in a polluted atmosphere sows the seed of disease and death in the human body. So the soul which lives in an impure moral atmosphere greatly injures itself. The spirit of worldliness, and the society of evil companions, should be most carefully avoided. 4. *Regular exercise.* Physical exercise is one of the conditions of health, and is the means of saving many a doctor's bill. In like manner, Christian work and the faithful discharge of religious duties is conducive to sound spiritual health.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH.

1. *Health is sometimes known by outward appearances.* The rosy cheeks, the sparkling eyes, the sonorous voice, all testify to health. One invalid in a family puts everything out of sorts. A healthy church may be known by its prayer-meetings, contributions, missionary spirit, &c. 2. *Health is known by tastes.* A sickly man's taste is bad. Unwholesome dainties are preferred to strong meat. So with regard to an unhealthy church. Its taste is bad. Silly anecdotes are preferred to good scriptural teaching—thinks much of forms and ceremonies, &c. 3. *Contentment of mind.* An unhealthy man is peevish, querulous, and difficult to please. So an unhealthy church. It is a fault-finding church. Never pleased with its ministry, with its officers, with its choir, &c. It fancies that matters are managed better everywhere than at home. 4. *Work.* Sickness disables a man for labour. Health stimulates to work. A healthy man cannot be idle. A healthy church may be known by its labour. It teaches the young, visits the sick and needy, supports the missions, &c.

III. THE DESIRABILITY OF A HEALTHY CHURCH.

1. *A healthy church is one of great comfort to itself.* Though a man has wide estates, baronial castles, chariots innumerable, and though he be rolling in wealth, if health fails, his chief comfort departs. So with a church. Though it may have a beautiful chapel, a crowded congregation, a large endowment; if lacking in spiritual health, its consolations are indeed small. 2. *A healthy church will survive through many trials.* The healthy man is heed-

less of easterly winds, and furious hurricanes. So a healthy church. It survives through persecutions, imprisonments, and martyrdom. Like the bush of old fires cannot destroy it. 3. *A healthy church is attractive.* Healthy neighbourhoods entice visitors. So healthy churches attract men into their communion, and make all who come better and holier. People shun unhealthy churches as they do fever dens. 4. *A healthy church is one likely to live.* Sickness is the precursor of death. When a church becomes morally sick, people will begin to speak of its death, funeral, and grave. But a healthy church will live. Its chapel may become dilapidated, its members may die, but the healthy church lives on.

LESSONS.—1. A morally sick church is a great curse to a neighbourhood. 2. The sooner the better that many a church should apply to the great Physician for spiritual healing. 3. The church will by and by become perfectly whole. 4. When perfectly whole, diseased persons will no longer be admitted into its fellowship (Rev. xxi. 27).—*J. Williams, Newcastle-Emlyn: "Cofiant."*

THE REWARDS OF BENEVOLENCE.

lviii. 10–12. *If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, &c.*

The Bible has one grand and peculiar character,—it is the book of goodness; it everywhere recommends and extols the principle of benevolence; its two grand precepts are love to God and love to man. It never dispenses with either. Knowledge, gifts of tongues, and even faith without works is dead. Of all the striking exhibitions of the beauty and value of this cardinal quality, none can excel the one given by the evangelical prophet in the text. Notice—

I. *The* **objects** *of benevolent regard.* These are described in two forms. 1. *The hungry.* Those who have craving appetites and no means to satisfy them. Such is, indeed, a pitiable condition, yet not by any means rare. This state, painful in itself, is often aggravated by *surrounding plenty.* It is difficult to hunger in time of famine; but where there is enough, what a temptation to steal! So thought Agur (Prov. xxx. 8, 9). 2. *To the afflicted.* This is much worse than poverty alone. Health gone; strength gone; resources dried up; thrown upon the bed of languishing, wearisome days and nights, &c. What wretched scenes are often discovered, &c. Often, too, this state is the reverse of their former condition in life. Often, too, poor friendless children have to suffer; and often there is a *worse* disease than that of the body,—a guilty spirit, a defiled conscience, and dreadful fears of a future state. Dwell upon such objects of misery. Think that it may be your lot.

II. *The* **nature** *of benevolent regards.* We are to exercise—1. *Tender compassion and sympathy.* Not be heedless and careless of such; not neglect; not be callous. Investigate, inquire, excite our best feelings; cherish soft and benevolent passions; annihilate selfishness; crucify self; labour after generosity and true charity; not wait for opportunities of doing good. There may be many things having a tendency to close our hearts. The improvidence of the poor, and ingratitude; cases of imposition. But we must not forget how miserable we should be if God gave us our deserts, &c. 2. *Kind and suitable aid.* Sympathy without this is mockery. God deems it an insult to Himself, and to His image, which man bears. Our assistance must be in proportion to our means. It should be timely,—in season; with kindness of manner; with prayer for God's blessing; from purity of motive,—not for show and ostentation; but out of love, &c., to the glory of God.

III. *The* **rewards** *of benevolent attention to the poor and afflicted.* 1. *It shall be followed by a dignified reputation.* No title or distinction equal to that of goodness. 2. Such *shall have the*

gracious guidance of God. How necessary is this, how desirable, how pre-eminently precious to have the providential interpositions of God, and the guiding influences of the Spirit. Guide rightly, graciously, to the end, even to a city of habitation. 3. *They shall have internal happiness and satisfaction.* When others are lean and comfortless, they shall be prosperous and happy (Ps. xli. 1–3). 4. *They shall have abundant spiritual prosperity.* Comforts, &c., shall not fail. God is the fountain; and as such, He never changes, &c. This reward is often the consolation of the benevolent in this life (Job xxix. 11–16). 5. *The full recompense shall be given at the last day* (Luke xiv. 14; Matt. xxv. 40, &c.).

APPLICATION.—Put not benevolence in the place of experimental piety. Yet, that is not genuine which does not produce benevolence. — *Jabez Burns, D.D.: Sketches of Sermons for Special Occasions*, pp. 209–212.

A HAPPY CHRISTIAN.

lviii. 11. *And the Lord shall guide thee continually, &c.*

The portrait of what the Christian is in his happiest times. The setting is a framework of duties (ver. 9, &c.). These blessings are not promised unconditionally, but they are fenced in with terms. I must, therefore, address myself to those who are living in the faith, &c., while I depict their happy state. Five distinct features of their felicity are mentioned. They are described as enjoying—

I. CONTINUAL GUIDANCE. There comes to them, as to other men, dilemmas in providence. The path of doctrine, also, is sometimes difficult. Spiritual experience. The LORD shall guide thee—not an angel. "Shall." "Continually." Grasp it by faith.

II. INWARD SATISFACTION. It is a blessed thing to have the soul satisfied, for the soul is of great capacity. The Christian has got what his soul wants, —a removal of all that which marred his peace, blighted his prosperity, and made his soul empty and hungry—sin-pardoned, satisfied with God's dispensations, promises, &c. In the worst times of distress he is still satisfied.

III. SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND HAPPINESS. It is a grand thing when the soul is in spiritual health, when the bones are made fat. Spiritual sickness is the condition of many. Do not be content short of spiritual vigour, &c.

IV. FLOURISHING FRUITFULNESS. This figure of a garden is a very sweet and attractive one. Some professors are not like this. There is little evidence of diligent cultivation in their character. The contrast between an unwatered and a watered garden.

V. UNFAILING FRESHNESS OF SUPPLY. Provided in the covenant of grace.

I can only regret that my text can have no bearing upon some of my hearers, to whom it must be read in the negative. Tremble at this! Terrible is your *present* state, but more terrible is the *future*. But there is hope yet. Jesus is able to save to the uttermost, &c. — *C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Nos. 735–736.

GOD THE GUIDE OF HIS PEOPLE.

lviii. 11. *The Lord shall guide thee continually.*

The people of God are strangers and pilgrims on the earth; they "seek a better country," &c. He needs a constant guide. His path is one he has never before traversed. He is ignorant of the way, and, without a guide, his course would be uncertain, and very probable his end unattained. God graciously engages to conduct him.

I. THE GOOD MAN'S NEED OF A GUIDE. Necessarily arises—

1. *From his ignorance.* He is not in darkness, but he is at present the child of the dawn. His knowledge is so limited, that he cannot trust to it. He only knows the first elements of truth. He has entered on the path of life, but he feels it necessary to seek

direction and guidance every step. For this he prays, &c. 2. *From the diversified paths which surround him.* Sin has a thousand treacherous paths, many of them apparently good, and most of them fascinating, &c. There are paths of mere morality, self-righteousness, &c. How necessary then to have a guide. 3. *From the temptation to which he is subject.* It is the work of Satan to allure and deceive, that he may ruin and destroy. He lays snares for the travellers' feet. He tries to turn them aside from the path of duty and safety, or to suggest that the way is tedious, embarrassing, and uncomfortable. 4. *The tendency of our own hearts to evil.* Only partially sanctified. Liable to err. Often willing to be deceived. Apt to turn aside (Heb. iii. 12). Let us now inquire—

II. How God guides His people.

1. *By the counsels of His truth* (Ps. lxxiii. 24). Given to be the guide of our steps. Here is plainly and distinctively marked out the way we should go (Ps. cxix. 5, 9, 32, 35, 59, 104). 2. *By the ministry of His servants.* Of old He raised up Moses, &c. He also came to minister and to teach mankind in the person of His Son (Heb. i. 2, &c.). He has established the ministry of the Word with the Christian dispensation (Ephes. iv. 11; 1 Cor. xii. 28). 3. *By the teaching of His Spirit* (John xiv. 16-26; xvi. 13).

III. What kind of a guide God is to His people.

1. *He is an infallible guide.* Incapable of error. Knows everything connected with the travellers, the way, and the perils to which they are exposed. Knows all things. 2. *He is patient and forbearing.* Remembers they are but dust. Endures their provocations—slow advances, &c. 3. *He is affectionate and tender.* As the shepherd kindly leads his flock. As the mother aids her infant child to walk. He breaks not the bruised reed, &c. 4. *He is constant and unfailing.* Never leaves. Guides their youth and mature years, and casts "not off in the time of old age," nor forsakes when their strength faileth. He guides even to death, and conducts to glory.

Conclusion.—1. Are you under the guidance of God? Have you yielded yourselves to Him, &c.? 2. Cherish a spirit suited to your character and condition—reverence and holy fear, confidence in God, fervent prayer, self-denial, &c. 3. Urge sinners to turn from the way of death and live.—*Jabez Burns, D.D., LL.D.: Sketches on Types and Metaphors*, pp. 112–115. (See p. 294, 296, 302.)

The Church the Garden of the Lord.

lviii. 11. *Thou shalt be like a watered garden.*

Sin blighted the moral creation of God, and turned the Eden of the Lord into a barren desert. Through the intervention of Divine mercy, God has set on foot a scheme of merciful renovation. United in the fellowship of the Gospel, the regenerate constitute His spiritual Church, and appear in our wilderness world as the "watered garden" of the Lord. As a garden the Church is—

I. Separated from the world. Originally like the waste howling wilderness, now distinct and separated, called out of the world as to spirit and character. In, but not of it; not like it—separated. To be manifest—as unlike the world as the garden is unlike the barren heath.

II. Surrounded by a protective fence. Otherwise it would be a prey to wild beasts; thoroughfare for every rude foot; would become a waste. Fenced round, as with a wall of adamant. God is its keeper and defence. He is round about in the energy of His omnific power (Ps. cxxv. 2).

III. In a state of cultivation and improvement. For the Church's cultivation He sends His Word, messengers, and the benign influences of His benevolent providential administrations

IV. Distinguished by its trees

AND PLANTS. The good man is likened to a lofty cedar, the useful olive, the fruitful vine, the fragrant myrtle, the thriving willow, &c. May be compared to flowers—adorned with the graces of the Spirit. Are said to be the Lord's planting (Matt. xv. 13; Ps. xcii. 12–14).

V. RICHLY WATERED BY THE BLESSING OF HEAVEN. Water is indispensible to fertility and growth, &c. The Spirit of God is often presented under this figure (ch. xxxv. 6, 7; John vii. 37; Isa. xliv. 3; lv. 1; xxvii. 3). These communications are essential to our comfort, well-being, fruitfulness, &c. They keep the garden of the Lord ever verdant, and produce from the trees of the Lord an abundant increase.

VI. THE LORD EXPECTS A RETURN OF FRUIT FROM IT. All the labour and outlay of God's goodness is to produce the fruits of holiness. This He expects; and how reasonable is the expectation, and how important to us! Do we render to the Lord the fruits of righteousness, &c.?

APPLICATION.—Do we form part of the Lord's garden? Are we the plants of His right-hand planting? Are we flourishing, retaining our verdure, growing, yielding fruit to God? The impenitent, as briers and thorns, He will consume in the day of His fiery indignation.—*Jabez Burns, LL.D.: Sketches on Types and Metaphors*, pp. 208–211.

A similar idea is presented in Jer. xxxi. 12. It forms one of the touches in the beautiful picture which the prophets give of the restored happiness and prosperity of the nation after the rigorous season of captivity and exile. Their experience in Babylon was one of drought and decay. It was like being driven into a wilderness where everything becomes parched and barren. The people had been prepared for this, during their state of declension, by the faithful messengers of Jehovah (ch. lxiv. 10; Jer. x. 26; xii. 10, 11; Ezek. xx. 35). Yet we see throughout the history that bright hopes are blended with dark judgments, and the flock, though scattered, are followed by the loving purpose of God, who means to effect a great redemption. Even the wilderness is to be a scene of reconciliation and hope (Hosea ii. 14).

Our text, then, presents the pleasant picture of the restored, united, and prosperous community, after their season of correction; and the image may well be used as suggestive, also, of Divine experiences in the individual soul.

I. A well-watered garden indicates the presence of life. To speak of a garden *without* life would be unmeaning and absurd, however much may be done by art and skill to create a pleasing scene. This thought has a real application for human souls. We are too apt to confine our ideas of life to the outward and superficial aspects of mere existence. We see around us a great deal of the *machinery* and *parade* of life. But the suspicion will force itself upon us that much of this is but the fencing in of uncultivated regions—useless labour bestowed upon barren and unproductive spots which are not "rich towards God." *There* is the secret of the well-watered garden. Christ emphasises the *life* that is in it, and a life, too, which can be deep, and full, and abiding, only as it is centered in the Divine fulness itself. This suggests the value of the promise to ancient Israel. As long as they were a scattered flock, separated from God above all by their evil affections, they were losing life. Their spiritual strength was decaying, they were living in a wilderness where all their powers were parched and blighted, and they were doing what so many are doing now—they were losing their own souls in the mere materialism of a godless and undevout life. We may depend upon it that things are going badly, and even tragically with us, when the roots of a growth towards God are showing no signs. We are made for the achievements of *faith:* if that life of faith be not in us, "the world is too much with us." Only by being transformed as into "a watered garden" can our true life be secured.

II. "A watered garden" is suggestive also of beauty. In the operations of nature, life and beauty go together. It is no mechanical labour, causing a sense of weariness; much less can we ever think of it as ugly and repulsive. Nature always *allures* us by her tenderness and her charms, and though always at work with marvellous energy, is always arrayed in garments of beauty. What numberless examples we have of this. To confine ourselves to the more limited image before us, what beauty is displayed by a "watered garden," in the unfolding of its numerous forms of life.

This conception of beauty in life is not sufficiently pondered by Christian people. We have always been more ready to emphasise the sterner sides of religion than its tender aspects, &c. There has been considerable reason for this in the fact that the military and disciplinary elements of life are always very real with us. But this should be no excuse for driving out the sweeter elements that should give grace and beauty to character. Besides, we should remember that *real* strength, when rooted in the soil of love, is also beautiful. Our fault is in separating the graces as though they would not live together. But "strength and beauty are in his sanctuary." Many a well-meaning life is made harsh and repulsive because it has ruggedness and massiveness

without tenderness and grace. How much more powerful and winning would the influence of our character be, if we would not persist in separating what God has joined together. Look into the garden of the soul, as it is presented in Christian teaching, and see what is expected to grow there (Gal. v. 22). And there is nothing which will give grace to the life which ought to be left out (Phil. iv. 8).

III. **Fruitfulness** is another thought suggested by the watered garden. We naturally expect to see, not merely leaves and flowers, however beautiful, but also *fruit*. This idea is, of course, involved in the passages just quoted to enforce the need for beauty, but the thought specially intended here is that the religion of Christ shows itself in the form of *active beneficence*, working as a Divine leaven in the midst of human life. The life rooted in Christ feels itself to be related to others. It exists, not for its own selfish ends, simply to absorb and to keep, but loves by its very bountifulness to enrich others. It thus aims to be reproductive, by bringing others to repeat the same experiences as we ourselves enjoy, and upon still higher levels. Look around on your neighbours and friends, on the community, on the world: look with the eye of love, with the mind of Christ. Is there not room to impart some spiritual gift? (Rom. i. 11; John xv. 8).

IV. I will put the thought in one other light. Our subject leads us to think of the need there is for cultured excellence. One of the main ideas suggested by such a garden as we have before our minds is, that it would be well tended and carefully cultivated, and therefore brought to yield *the best of which it is capable*. Weeds and noxious things, that only occupy valuable ground and prevent useful growth, are not tolerated: they are rooted up and cast out. The owner is not satisfied that it should yield anything less than its *best*. To this end he bestows upon it varied effort and ceaseless care. Ask any wise husbandman if he would care to risk a valuable garden by leaving it to the mercy of *natural selection*! Here we touch a point which ought to occasion us great searching of heart. Nothing can excuse indifference here, where it is to be feared our indifference is greatest. Do we suppose that no culture is needed for this garden of the soul, from which God is expecting so much? Look, then, on the one hand, at the results of life when it is recklessly left as a vineyard unkept—its ignorance, its grovelling sins, its animalism, its profanities, its vices. On the other hand, look at life in its higher and diviner forms—its watchfulness, its prayerfulness, its circumspection, its self-control, its heroisms. The *weeds* of life require no culture, the real *fruits* of life can be obtained only by highest care.

Let us not be satisfied with the *littlenesses* of life. We are called and destined for infinitely greater things than we have yet reached. The garden of the soul needs to be more richly watered with heavenly influence and power, that the whole scene of our motives and activities may be so quickened and enlarged that our service may be a whole-hearted faithfulness to God and man. This, however, is to be secured by three things—1. A rooting (John xv. 4). 2. A growth (2 Pet. iii. 18). 3. A discipline, called by Christ a pruning (John xv. 2). This is the process by which God designs to get out of us the fruits of the seeds He has first of all put into us.—*W. Manning.*

The Sabbath (α).

lviii. 13, 14. *If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, &c.*

The first religious ordinance instituted by God in this new created earth was the Sabbath; the day of rest after six days work. Most remarkable was the manner of the institution—by the example of Almighty God Himself (Gen. ii. 1–3). Instituted by God between two and three thousand years before the law was given upon Mount Sinai as an ordinance for the Jews, it was designed to promote man's temporal as well as his spiritual good; on its due observance man's welfare, both here and hereafter, very mainly depends; by its neglect God is dishonoured, and man is wounded and hurt.

I. How the Lord's Day is to be sanctified. 1. *By public worship.* On that day especially we are to pay unto Him the worship *due* unto His name. Public worship is a *debt* we owe to God (Ps. xxix. 2; xcvi. 8); and we should be as careful to pay it as we are the debts we owe our fellowmen. 2. *By private meditation and prayer.* We are to regard it as a day of rest and cessation from the common business and occupation of life, as a season dedicated to God. Our conversation and our thoughts are to be directed, not to temporal, but to spiritual concerns. Let us reflect upon the things of which it reminds us—the creation of the world, the resurrection of Christ; and of that which it foreshadows—the everlasting rest which remaineth for the people of God.

II. THE BLESSINGS WHICH FOLLOW UPON A DUE OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S DAY. 1. We shall grow in wisdom and grace. 2. Even in this imperfect and troublesome world, we shall learn to delight ourselves in the Lord. 3. When the number of earthly Sabbaths is complete, we shall be found, by God's grace, meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

III. THE EVIL EFFECTS WHICH ALWAYS FOLLOW PROFANED AND NEGLECTED SABBATHS. 1. The world, with its drying, withering influence, will take entire possession of the heart. Even when the Lord's Day is only *occasionally* neglected, the natural result does not fail to follow—religion is at a stand-still. But where it is *habitually* profaned, irreligion, hardness of heart, utter indifference and carelessness about the soul, about God, and about eternity, inevitably ensue. 2. The natural faults and corruptions of our nature, being never checked by the wholesome bridle of God's Word, will run away with us, and never stop until they have urged us into perdition. Sabbaths spent in idleness and bad company have *often* to young men and women, in the highest as well as the lowest walks of life, been the first links of a chain, of which the middle were vice, crime, shame, death; and the last link, the tormenting flame! 3. We shall find unbroken toil a sore burden. 4. Death, instead of bringing us rest, will increase our burden a thousandfold in the kingdom of darkness.—*Bishop Hervey: Sermons for the Sundays and Principal Holydays throughout the Year*, vol. i. 122–133.

(a) See outlines on ch. lvi. 2, 6; and Dr. Barnes' Commentary *in loco*.

The law of the Sabbath, as instituted at the creation, and subsequently inserted in the Decalogue, instead of being repealed, retains its full authority. The sacredness of the obligation of its observance is now transferred, with undiminished force, from the seventh day of the week to the first. The sanctification of the Sabbath is still required on the same principles, in the same spirit, and for the same purposes. The only difference is, that the motives which impel to its due observance have acquired an accession of strength. Most important, therefore, is the inquiry on which we are now about to enter: *In what manner should the Sabbath be observed?*

The due sanctification of the Sabbath requires,—

I. *A cessation from the ordinary labours and occupations of life.*

II. *A consecration of the entire day to the spiritual engagements and delights which peculiarly belong to it.* "Remember the Sabbath *day* to keep it holy;" that is, let the entire day be separated from the occupations of other days, and consecrated to the service and enjoyment of God.

III. *The public acknowledgment and adoration of our God and Saviour, in acts of social worship.*

IV. *The conscientious and diligent discharge of the domestic duties of religion.* With much prayer, tenderness, perseverance, and ingenuity, let Sabbath opportunities be used for the purposes of Christian education (H. E. I., 803–806). Let not your servants be neglected. They have many claims on your Christian regard. Let them have reason to bless God for entering your family. Consult and adopt the best means of promoting their eternal interests.

V. *The performance of the works of charity and mercy.—H. P. Burder, D.D.: Sermons*, pp. 426–448.

I. Our first object must be to see what God's Word tells us respecting the origin, meaning, and importance of the primitive Sabbath. II. How far do these things apply to us? Is it God's will that we should still set apart one day in seven as a season of holy rest? III. What are some of the purposes of the institution of the Lord's Day?—*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.: Sermons*, pp. 255–291.

I. The true Sabbath. II. Its obligation. III. Advantage.

I. In what light we should regard

the Sabbath. II. How we should employ it. III. The benefits arising from its proper observance.

I. The proper observance of the Sabbath. Its rest, pleasures, occupations, conversation. II. The consequent blessings. 1. Delight in the Lord. 2. Exaltation—victory over enemies, freedom from all false systems of worship (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3; Eph. vi. 12). 3. Prosperity—abundance of spiritual food (Deut. xxxii. 13, 14; ch. xlix. 9); assurance of final security (Ps. xxviii 9). III. The confirmation. God is faithful, cannot deceive; He will do as He has said (Num. xxiii. 19; Ps. xxii. 5; Job xxiii. 13).—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

The Supposed and the Real Cause of Failure in the Church.

lix. 1, 2. *Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, &c.*

As the Church is essentially an aggressive institution, at some periods her success has been most marked; at other times her energies have seemed paralysed. It behoves us not only to inquire into the conditions of the Church's growth and expansion, but to be most careful as to our spirit and conduct, lest we by any means should prevent her development. In certain conditions, on the testimony of God's Word, we may be sure of her growth; in certain others we may be as sure of her failure. Her expansion depends upon her purity, &c.; while her failure is as inseparably associated with her sins. The excuses that are often made for the Church's non-success would be amusing had they not reference to so very solemn a subject. To us we confess they appear alarming, as they seem in many instances to indicate ignorance in regard to the very fundamental conditions of growth and prosperity. If she does not accomplish her soul-saving work something must be wrong. Excuses for her failure generally reflect more or less on the Divine Being and government, an issue from which thoughtful and devout minds ought at once to recoil. The text rebukes those who would so think or speak. Israel in the days of Isaiah attended to the outward forms of religion; and yet tokens of the Divine favour were withheld; and when these favours did not come as in the olden time, the people blamed God, instead of charging it to their own sins. The text is an answer to their utterances (ch. lviii.). Consider—

I. The supposed cause of the Church's non-success. This has reference to the work of the Spirit, and to unanswered prayer. Dwell—

1. *On the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church.* Upon His grace all prosperity in the Church depends. In some periods God has been pleased to pour out very abundantly His Holy Spirit. At other times He seems strangely to withhold this necessary gift. The all-important question then is: Why is the Divine Spirit withheld? Some affirm—(1.) Because it is God's will. Is this true? It is contradicted by *experience.* Church history and observation teach that every great revival in the Church has been preceded by the action of the Church herself. Prayer has become more fervent and constant, &c. It is also contradicted *by the clear teaching of Holy Scripture.* We are not directed to wait till God shall in His sovereign wisdom determine to send us the Holy Ghost; but we are taught distinctly to pray for Him (Luke xi. 13, with Matt. vii. 7; Jas. iv. 3). (2.) We are not to expect any extraordinary manifestations of spiritual power in these days. Though we do not need the "cloven tongues," &c., we know of no scripture that would discourage the expectation of the conversion of even three thousand in one day. Pentecost was the type and pledge of something greater and better. We are living in the "latter days," and there are many plain indications that we ought now to expect the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy. Plainly, then, if the Spirit is withheld it is not because the "Lord's arm is shortened."

2. *The efficacy of prayer in the Church.* God is moved by the prayers of His people. Witness Moses, Elijah, &c. (Jas. v. 16). Why then so many prayers unanswered? For the cause we must look into the Church rather than up to God.

II. THE REAL CAUSE. As of old—our sins. Look at this matter of sin in the Church. Though the Church in this age may be innocent of those more flagrant transgressions (ch. lviii.), yet are we not guilty before heaven, for stopping in some measure the spread and growth of the Church. Let us particularise a few of the Church's sins. Think of—1. *Her worldly spirit.* 2. *Her formalism.* 3. *Her apathy in reference to the masses.* It but remains, now that we see the cause of the Church's small success, that we humble ourselves before God, &c.—*F. Crozier: The Methodist Recorder*, July 14, 1871.

GOD'S POWER UNDIMINISHED.

By the Lord's hand His power is intended. By the hand of His power He is in contact with the object on which He designs to operate. The question proposed is this: Is His power diminished? Its present extent is considered in relation to some previously recognised extent of it. It was previously recognised as without limit. Is it now less? The text is really an affirmation in the form of an interrogation. The Lord's hand is not shortened: His power is not diminished. This is the answer to the question in Numbers xi. 23 and Isaiah l. 2. Let us consider the truth and some applications of it.

I. THE TRUTH ITSELF (see p. 365).

It is that the Lord's power was and is unlimited, and therefore equal to anything it becomes Him to do or which He has undertaken to do.

In creation, providence, and redemption, the Divine power has been displayed, &c.

Omnipotence, then, is an attribute of the Divine nature. We probably regard this as a settled point. But the river of our faith does not exhibit an uninterrupted flow. It encounters obstacles at many points. It sometimes suffers loss. When a new difficulty occurs we debate the whole question. Notwithstanding our clear perception of the greatness of God's power, the temptation is to measure it by our own. We catch the infection of the world's atmosphere. We are told that if science declares a thing impossible, and revelation declares it possible, science must win the victory. We lack the courage to reply that science is only the human knowledge of the day, which is continually undergoing change. The wonders of the past were pronounced impossible by the science of the past. And as the divine science of the past has shown itself in advance of the human, it will show its superiority in the future. God is unchangeable. Human power, after being used a given time, becomes feeble, and eventually incapable of exertion. There is no cause of decay or diminution in God. He can neither increase nor diminish; because He is infinite and immutable. Let us mention—

II. SOME OF ITS APPLICATIONS (see pp. 365, 366):—

1. *It should be applied to our temporal anxieties.* Moses and the children of Israel (Num. xi.). The disciples and the five thousand people. How frequently in the experience of believers has there been some pressing difficulty, from which extrication seemed impossible, and their customary faith staggered under its weight, when an unexpected way was made by some new turn of affairs, and the difficulty disappeared. It may have happened to some of you. God seemed to ask an answer to the question: "Is my hand shortened?" 2. *It should be applied to spiritual difficulties.* Many things clearly revealed in the Gospel as things that may happen. We do not see how they can. Falling into the snare of the devil we measure the Divine power by our own. "How can these things be?" &c. Do some of you say the difficulty in the way of your salvation is insuperable because of your extreme sinfulness and hardness? You are measuring the Lord

by yourself. You are putting a limit to the power of His Spirit and the efficacy of the Saviour's blood. 3. *It should be applied to the world's conversion.* You look abroad on the world with something like the prophet's hopeless scepticism. Can these bones live? It is beyond you. But it is not beyond Him. 4. *It should be applied to our intellectual doubts.* There are many questions in respect to which we are driven upon the simplest trust in the Divine character. Take only the resurrection from the dead. The apostle throws the whole question back on the Divine power by the analogy of the sowing and the reaping, which to man is impossible and inexplicable (1 Cor. xv. 36, 38).

The grand lesson from this subject is the cheerful acceptance of our Divinely appointed lot. Cease to measure Him by ourselves. Simply trust.—*J. Rawlinson.*

Isaiah condemns the sins of ancient Israel, and justifies the judgments of God. Observe—

I. WHAT SIN HAS DONE. 1. Mark its tendency to separate the soul from God. It estranged man from God at the very beginning. It does the same still, and if unforgiven will separate from Him to all eternity. 2. It has obscured and withdrawn from us the tokens of His favour. 3. It fearfully indisposes you to return: you refuse His overtures, &c.

II. WHAT GRACE CAN DO. 1. There is no deficiency in God's power to save. We are prone to limit the Holy One of Israel. Satan, who labours to diminish the evil of sin before its commission, equally loves to aggravate and enhance the difficulties of reconciliation. All obstacles to the sinner's restoration removed by Christ. 2. There is an infinite willingness in the heart of God to rescue and to save (ch. lv. 6–9), &c. God has shown His mercy to the chief of sinners. Heaven itself is a colony of saved souls. Christ describes Himself as more deeply wounded by the rejection of His mercy than He was by the agonies of the cross.

III. THE VAST IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING MERCY—mercy to pardon sin, and grace to subdue it. 1. Seek Him in the full faith of His unbounded grace. 2. Labour to acquire a just sense and apprehension of the magnitude and aggravation of your rebellion. You cannot be united to Christ unless you be divorced from sin. 3. Own and accept Christ in all His relations and offices. 4. Be diligent and earnest in prayer. 5. Honour the work of the Spirit. 6. Keep Heaven and Eternity full in view.—*Samuel Thodey.*

I. A lamentable state — separation from God. Loss of His favour. No access to Him. II. The cause of it. Much of all knowledge lies in the knowledge of causes. 1. Not in God—He is able and willing to save. 2. But in ourselves—our sins.—*Archbishop Leighton: Works* (1868 edition), pp. 428–432.

Man's miseries—I. May not be charged upon God. He is able to save. Willing to save. II. Must be referred to man's wickedness. Actual — in thought, word, deed negligent; infatuated.—*Dr. Lyth.*

SIN SEPARATING FROM GOD.

lix. 2. *But your iniquities have separated, &c.*

Present separation supposes previous union and capacity for it. Man is capable of communion with God. God is capable of communion with man. There was a time when they were in full communion—when man was pure. When he fell he lost, not the capacity, but the privilege. How great a loss it was! Why are these two, so fitted to each other, one of them absolutely needing the other, separated? Sin has effected the separation. It produced it at first. It is the only hindrance in the way of friendly intercourse. This is the doctrine of our text.

I. *Sin* unfits *man for communion with God.*

Unrepented, unforsaken, unforgiven sin. Such sin is utterly contrary to God's holy nature. If you have been at any time guilty of sin which you are unwilling to renounce, you have felt that intercourse between God and you was incongruous and presumptuous. Do we not all know this by experience?

II. *Sin* disinclines *man for communion with God.*

It is "enmity against God." He who wrongs another will avoid his society if he thinks the wrong is known. The presence of the victim is a rebuke to his conscience and an excitement of his fears. The passage to dislike and hatred will probably not be slow. Is not this the course of the human heart in relation to God? Why do the great majority of men around us seem to live without any conscious thought of

God, &c.? He is avoided because there is a deep consciousness of sin. God, instead of being the object of supreme love, has become, through man's conduct toward Him, the object of fear. Examine your own experience. Does a life of willing sin incline you to pray?

III. *Sin excludes man from communion with God.*

It is possible not only for us to separate ourselves from God, but for Him to separate Himself from us. It is conceivable that a man, while unwilling to forsake his sin, might desire the advantage of intercourse with God in prayer and religious services. Many have imagined that by these they would compensate the Divine Being for sin. This notion seems to have been entertained in the time of Isaiah. The religious services and the flagrant iniquities of the Jewish people are described together. God declines to accept the services because of the iniquities (ch. lviii., lix.). No multitude of prayers or religious observances can be set against the holiness of heart and life which are required in those that come into any association with God. The spotless holiness of His nature forbids. Thus then the case stands.

CONCLUSION. — What, then, have God and man cut each other off from all possibility of happy intercourse, &c.? We owe it to God's mercy that the breach can be repaired. A qualified Mediator has appeared, &c., has bridged over the distance sin had made between God and man. Repenting of your sins, casting yourselves at the footstool of mercy through the cross, friendship is restored. He becomes accessible. The call is addressed to every sinner. His Spirit will be given to help.

This subject teaches the great evil and danger of sin as the separater.—*J. Rawlinson.*

Vers. 3, 4. A sad picture of depravity. I. In the hands and fingers. II. The lips and tongue. III. Desires and motives. IV. Heart and imagination. V. Life and conduct.

Ver. 4. I. Actions proceed from thoughts. II. Correspond to the thoughts which produce them. III. Hence, when mischief is conceived iniquity is the produce.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Vers. 5, 6. I. The devices of the wicked. Like eggs — productive. Like cockatrices' eggs — injurious. (α.) Like spiders' webs—frail, useless. (β.) II. Their effect. Upon others—mischief, death. Upon themselves—disappointment, retribution.—*Dr. Lyth.*

See the spider's web, behold in it a most suggestive picture of the hypocrite's religion. 1. It is meant to catch his prey; the spider fattens himself on flies, and the Pharisee has his reward. Foolish persons are easily entrapped by the loud professions of pretenders, and even the more judicious cannot always escape. Philip baptized Simon Magus, whose guileful declaration of faith was so soon exploded by the stern rebuke of Peter. Custom, reputation, praise, advancement, and other flies, are the small game which hypocrites take in their nets. 2. A spider's web is a marvel of skill; look at it and admire the cunning hunter's wiles. Is not a deceiver's religion equally wonderful. How does he make so barefaced a lie appear to be a truth? How can he make his tinsel answer so well the purpose of gold? 3. A spider's web comes all from the creature's own bowels. The bee gathers her wax from flowers; the spider sucks no flowers, and yet she spins out her material to any length. Even so hypocrites find their hope and trust within themselves; their anchor was forged on their own anvil, and their cable twisted by their own hands. They lay their own foundation, and hew out the pillars of their own house, disdaining to be debtors to the sovereign grace of God. 4. But a spider's web is very frail. It is curiously wrought, but not enduringly manufactured. It is no match for the servant's broom, or the traveller's staff. The hypocrite needs no battery of Armstrongs to blow his hopes to pieces, a mere puff of wind will do it. Hypocritical cobwebs will soon come down when the broom of destruction begins its purifying work. 5. Which reminds us of one more thought, viz., that such cobwebs are not to be endured in the Lord's house. He will see to it that they and those who spin them shall be destroyed for ever. O my soul, be thou resting on something better than a spider's web. Be the Lord Jesus thine eternal hiding-place.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

WEBS BUT NOT GARMENTS.

lix. 6. *Their webs shall not become garments.*

What a telling blow the prophet deals at the corruptions of his age! His illustration is homely, but, on that account, all the more forcible. The whole passage presents an appalling picture of the state of society,—powers perverted, &c. The two things always go together—the practice of

wickedness, and recourse to vain excuses to palliate it. An evil course cannot long be pursued without some plea which justifies it to the sinner's mind. These fictions are the very food on which his sin lives. Tear them away, and you strip him of those defences behind which he fortifies himself in the practice of iniquity. This is what God's prophet is trying to do; not only denouncing sin, but exposing the worthlessness of the pleas by which it is encouraged. These fancies he characterises as "spiders' webs" (ver. 5); and, continuing the metaphor (ver. 6), he declares—"Their webs shall not become garments." It is a kindness to undeceive one who labours under a fatal mistake, however unpleasant the task. Some of you are the victims of soul-destroying delusions; but soon you will pass into a world of reality, where every dark subterfuge in which you try to hide yourselves, will be illumined in all its corners by the fierce and searching light of eternity. You are weaving your subtle webs of fancy and practice now, bestowing pains upon them, thinking well of them, and gaining the approval of others; but they are mere shoddy, which, though it pass from the loom, is worthless for wear. Let us visit some of the looms in the great factory of human life, and see what sort of fabrics the weavers are turning out.

I. There is one who is weaving the web of **a respectable life**. Living for appearances, squaring his opinions and behaviour by the maxims of the world; pleasant and accommodating whatever company he may enter, and putting up even with Christian society, if they are not too decided. No strong principles has he to bring him into collision with other people. His principle is to have no principles, but to fall in with those of others. If ever he offered a real prayer it would be—"O God, keep me on good terms with the world; save me from anything that would incur its censure, or draw down upon me its frown." He worships the goddess of respectability. It would never do for him to be anything but sober, honest, and industrious. He cannot throw into his web the dark threads which they use who have sunk so low as to have no regard even for public opinion. It has attractive colours and a glossy surface. Such goods are in demand in the world's market; but with no higher purpose, his web shall not become a garment. He has lived without the thought of God, and tried to do as others do, not what conscience and Scripture command.

II. At another loom sits a busy worker weaving the web of **formalism**. The formalist sees something good in religion, but is mistaken as to the way in which its blessedness is secured. His trust is in the outward observance of religious ceremonies, forgetting that the Kingdom of God is a thing of the heart. Precise and regular in his church attendance and Sabbath observance, he is yet cold and heartless. No warm, loving impulse stirs his soul. He has made a god of religious routine (Job viii. 13, 14). It is hard to undeceive such a man, just because of his familiarity with sacred things (Matt. xxi. 31). He who weaves such a web, is only preparing a winding-sheet for his dead soul.

III. There is another weaving the web of **self-righteousness**. Not blindly trusting in ceremonies, but relying on an upright life. Without a change of heart he tries to obey the law (Rom. x. 3), but his view of sin is defective. So long as the Divine law is regarded as an outward rule, you may think you render a tolerably perfect obedience, but let its light shine into the heart and it reveals the sinner's guilt (Rom. vii. 7–9). Self-righteousness may be a web, but it never shall become a garment (ch. lvii. 12; lxiv. 6). We are to work not *for* but *from* acceptance and pardon. Never can we fulfil the law until the heart has been changed by the experience of God's mercy (Phil. iii. 9).

IV. Further on we encounter another who is weaving the web of **reliance on the future**. A young man who promises himself long life and abundant oppor

tunity. He is bent on trying some experiments in weaving before he settles down to serious work. He means to attend to religious matters, but not just now. Can he count upon the uncertain future? can he promise himself inclination and opportunity? That is the web which the young are prone to weave. How is it with those more advanced in life?

V. Here is an old man busily weaving the web of **amendment**, thinking thus to atone for the vices and follies of an ill-spent youth. But can any resolution for the future wipe out the guilt of the erring past? If he wishes to begin life anew he must go to the cross, and make that his starting-point, but he blindly imagines that reformation of life will supply the garment which he needs.

VI. Have I exhausted the various classes of weavers? Alas for our race if I have! Many find the requisite garment provided for them in the **righteousness of Christ** (Rom. iii. 21–26; iv. 5). It fits us, becomes us, protects us, will never grow old, and will never be out of fashion. How can you appear before God in the flimsy dress of your own manufacture? (Matt. xxii. 11–13). But do we cease to be weavers when we "put on the Lord Jesus Christ?" The weaving of the right sort can only then begin; for, the righteousness wrought out for us and imputed becomes a righteousness wrought in us and imparted Christ takes the web of our life into his own hands (1 Cor. i. 30; Gal. ii. 20). Instead of leading to licentiousness a free justification alone can sanctify the life (Rom. vi. 1–4).

To which class of weavers do you belong? Look at your life — how profitless, purposeless, and polluted! Can that web clothe you for standing before God, when it is finished and removed from the beam? Throw it away, tear it to shreds, abandon alike your good and bad works, and listen to the Redeemer's voice (Rev. iii. 18). You pity the poorly-clad amid the biting frosts and snows of winter, but more to be pitied are they who advance into the winter of declining years, the chill region of death, and the storms of judgment, with no sufficient clothing for their defenceless souls!—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

Ver. 7. Depravity. I. Has its seat in the heart. II. Its expression in the conduct. III. Its issue in misery and ruin.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Ver. 8. I. The characters described. Those who make crooked paths—1. From the line of duty prescribed by the law. 2. By the Gospel. 3. By conscience. II. Their awful condition. Cannot know peace. In life—death—eternal world.—*C. Simeon, M.A.*

The path of transgressors is one—I. Of contention. II. Of injustice. III. Of perverseness. IV. Of misery.

Vers. 9–15. I. The misery of sinners. No light, comfort, certainty, security, relief, salvation. II. The cause. Transgression multiplied, acknowledged, aggravated, open, wilful, exciting justly the displeasure of God.—*Dr. Lyth.*

Help for Seekers of the Light.

lix. 9. *We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness.*

I. I address myself, through the words of the text, to persons who are desirous of obtaining the true and heavenly light, who have waited hoping to receive it, but instead of obtaining it are in a sadder state than they were, and they are almost driven into the dark foreboding that for them no light will ever come; they shall be prisoners chained for ever in the valley of the shadow of death. 1. *These persons are in some degree aware of their natural darkness.* They are looking for light. They are not content with their obscurity, they are waiting for brightness. They discover in their nature much of evil, they would fain be rid of it; they find in their understanding much ignorance, and they would fain be illuminated. They pant to escape from this ignorance, they desire to know the truth which saves the soul; and their desire is not only to know it in theory, but to know it by its practical power upon the inner man. 2. *They have a high idea of*

what the light is. In the text they call it "brightness." They wait for it, and are grieved because it comes not. 3. *They have some hope that they may yet obtain this light;* in fact, they are waiting for it, hopefully waiting, and are somewhat disappointed that after waiting for the light, behold, obscurity has come. They are evidently astonished at the failure of their hopes. 4. *They have learned to plead their case with God,* for our text is a complaint addressed to the Lord Himself. It is a declaration of inward feelings, a laying bare of the heart's agonies to the Most High.

II. It shall now be my happy task to endeavour to assist into the light those who would fain flee from the darkness, by trying to answer the query, "How is it that I, being desirous of light, have not found it yet? Why has not the Lord revealed Himself to me?" 1. *You may have been seeking the light in the wrong place.* Many, like Mary, seek the living amongst the dead. You may have been the victim of the false doctrine that peace with God can be found in the use of ceremonies, &c. You may have been looking for salvation in the mere belief of a certain creed. 2. *You may have sought it in the wrong spirit.* When we ask for pardon, reconciliation, salvation, we must remember to whom we speak, and who we are who ask the favour. Some appear to deal with God as if He were bound to give salvation; as if salvation indeed were the inevitable result of a round of performances (H. E. I. 3431, 3432), or the deserved reward of a certain amount of virtue. You must come down from such vainglorious notions; you must sue out your pardon, as our law courts put it, *in formâ pauperis;* you must come before God as a humble petitioner, pleading the promises of mercy, abhorring all idea of merit, confessing that if the Lord condemn, He has a right to do it; and that if He save, it will be an act of pure, gratuitous mercy. 3. Others have not obtained peace *because they have not yet a clear idea of the true way of finding it.* The way of peace with God is seen through a haze by most men, so that if you put it ever so plainly, they will, if it be possible, misunderstand you. They will not give a simple look to the Saviour, and rely alone on Him. The waters of Abana and Pharpar are preferred by proud human nature, but the waters of Jordan alone can take away the leprosy. 4. Perhaps you have not found light *because you have sought it in a half-hearted manner.* None enter heaven who are but half inclined to go there. Cold prayers ask God to refuse them (H. E. I. 3831–3835). 5. *There may be some sin within thee which thou art harbouring to thy soul's peril.* Art thou willing to give sin up? If not, it is all lost time for me to preach Christ to thee, for He is not meant to be a Saviour of those who persevere in sin. He came to save His people *from* their sins, not *in* them; and if thou still must needs cling to a darling sin, be not deceived, for within the gates of heaven thou canst never enter (H. E. I. 2823, 2856, 4597–4602). 6. *It may be that you have only sought peace with God occasionally.* After an earnest sermon you have been awakened, but when the sermon has been concluded, you have gone back to your slumber like the sluggard who turns again upon his bed. After a sickness, or when there has been a death in the family, you have then zealously bestirred yourself; but anon you have declined into the same carelessness as before. Oh! fool that you are, remember he wins not the race who runs by spurts, but he who continues running to the end.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,* No. 884.

Ver. 12. Conviction of sin. I. Our transgressions are revealed in the light of God's countenance. II. Testify against us. III. Produce condemnation in the conscience. IV. Cannot be evaded—we know them.

Confession of sin. Includes—I. A perception of its guilt—committed against God—multiplied. II. An acknowledgment of its guilt—"They testify," &c. Justly awaken God's displeasure. III. A sense of its misery. Condemnation—compensation. IV. A full conviction of our own demerit and helplessness. —*Dr. Lyth.*

Ver. 13. Sin and its aggravation. I. In its

lowest form it is transgression against God. II. Is aggravated by apostacy. III. Still more by its propagation. IV. Most of all, when it is conceived and uttered of set purpose.

Vers. 14, 15. Society in a demoralised condition. I. Right and justice perverted. II. Truth and equity excluded. III. Falsehood predominant. IV. The good oppressed. V. God justly displeased.

Vers. 16–19. God's interposition for His people. I. The occasion. They were in distress—helpless—no deliverer. II. The display of His power. He brings salvation—by righteousness—His own. III. His weapons. Righteousness — salvation — vengeance. IV. The glorious issue. Recompense to His enemies. Deliverance for His people.—*Dr. Lyth.*

Zeal—The Best Cloak.

lix. 17. *And was clad with zeal as a cloke.*

The solitary champion here spoken of we cannot fail to recognise as the Prince of the house of David, our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever may have been the first and primary meaning of the text, &c., of Him we may say beyond and above all others, that He "was clad with zeal as a cloke."

When the grace of God has wrought in a man all other virtues, zeal is still needed to elevate and perfect his entire manhood (*α*).

One of the first requisites of an earnest, successful, soul-winning man must be zeal. As well a chariot without its steeds, a sun without its beams, a heaven without its joy, as a man of God without zeal.

I. Zeal is to be regarded as a cloak that covers all.

The Christian man is to wear zeal as we wear an outward garment which covers all the rest of our garments—a flowing robe which encompasses the entire person.

1. *Zeal is all-enveloping.* The Christian is to invest himself with faith, love, patience; but zeal must be over all these, just as the traveller in the snowstorm wraps himself up in his greatcoat, or binds his cloak about him. 2. *Zeal is preserving.* The cloak covers the arm, the breast, the heart, and all the more delicate parts of the body. Zeal is to wrap up the whole man, so that when he is subject to a furious hail of persecution, or a biting wind of poverty, or a torrent of downpouring griefs, the pilgrim to the skies may hold on his way, and bid all weathers brave defiance. 3. *Zeal is comforting,* even as the cloak when wrapped about the traveller in the snowstorm. The man who is possessed by an irresistible passion for carrying out his life-work, will gird this gracious ardour well around him, and let the snow-flakes come as they may, they will only fall, as it were, into a furnace, and will melt before they can injure. You who have zeal for God in your Sabbath school, will find it protect you from the numbing influence that will come over you in the class. 4. *Zeal endures.* There is no more becoming garment to the Christian when he possesses all the virtues than an all-enveloping zeal. You will not be as Christians thought beautiful in the eyes of angels and perfect intelligences (and these are the best judges of beauty), because you coldly pursue the regular rounds of duty; but you will be beautiful to them if you glow, and flame, and blaze with intense affection towards God. 5. *We must take care to put on zeal as a cloak and not as a hood.* Nobody wears his cloak over his head, and yet I have known some persons whose zeal has entirely blindfolded their judgment (*β*). 6. Zeal is a cloak, *and therefore is not intended to supersede the other graces.* We do not see the traveller climbing the Alps with nothing upon his body but his cloak—that would be most absurd; and so zeal cannot take the place of knowledge, &c. It is a cloak, which is a great thing, it is true, but it is nothing more than a cloak, and the rest of the garments must be carefully attended to. 7. Zeal is a cloak, *and therefore we are not to regard it as an extraordinary robe to be worn only occasionally on high days and holidays.* A man reckons his cloak not to be a thing in which to walk in state with my lord through the streets, but as a

portion of his ordinary working-day dress; and so ought our zeal to be. If it be genuine zeal it will be like the cloak which always hangs ready on the nail in the hall. Nay, since the storm is always on, and we are always pilgrims, it will be like the cloak which we cannot bear to lay aside. 8. While I say that zeal is not everything, recollect that *the cloak covers everything, and do not let your zeal be such a scanty thing that it will only hang like a girdle round your loins*, but let it be a great wrapper in which to enfold all your manhood, apparent everywhere; not secret and inward alone, but revealed and active. Our Lord is said to *put on* zeal as a cloak; He manifested and displayed His holy fervour; He had not zeal in His heart merely, *but He had zeal outwardly as well.* Where there is grace in the heart, it soon shows itself in the life.

II. OBSERVE HOW OUR LORD EXHIBITED THIS ZEAL.

1. *In His earliest childhood, you have tokens of His inward zeal.* He is found in the Temple. 2. *In after life*, you see His burning zeal in leaving all the comforts of life. What but His zeal brought Him to such a condition that He said, "Foxes have holes," &c. *His very dress showed His zeal*, because it was not ostentatious, but in every way suitable for incessant labour and humble service. He had given up all the dainties, ay, and all the comforts of life, for the one great object of accomplishing our redemption. 3. He showed His earnestness *in persevering in His work under all manner of rebuffs.* He was constantly misrepresented. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. Still He never turned aside from His work. 4. As a clearer proof of His zeal, *all the blandishments of the world could not attract Him.* The excited crowd would have taken Him by force, and have made Him a king, but such was His zeal for the one work He had in hand, that He counted royal honours to be less than nothing and vanity. Many a man has been zealous for God till he has met with fierce persecutions, and then he has turned his back; and many more have been zealous in the highest degree until wealth came in their way, and the possibilities of honour, and then they have stooped, and have licked the world's foot, and have been mere poodles of fashion; their ardour for truth has evaporated, and their zeal has fled. 5. Look at *His incessant labours.* His life was very short—in truth, it consists of only three years of labour, as the former part of His life was spent in obscurity—and there we leave it as God has left it—but the three active years of His earthly sojourn, how they are crowded with incident! 6. Look at *His preaching*, and you see His zeal (γ). 7. You see His zeal *in His prayers.* What cries and groans; what strong cryings and tears were those that shook the gates of heaven, as Jesus prayed and pleaded for the sons of men! Ah! if you seek a pattern of zeal, you must stand in the garden, &c. 8. He proved His zeal again *by giving up Himself.* Having persevered alone when deserted by His friends, He persevered still when given over to His enemies. What zeal was that which makes Him stand so silent before the bar of Pilate? It was a wonderful triumph of Christ thus to hold His tongue. A master speaker feels an intense longing to speak when great occasions demand his voice, but Jesus was greater than a master speaker, for He was a great master of silence, and He restrained Himself, and uttered not a word. Then when they scourged Him, &c., a wish of His could have destroyed them all; but His zeal was with Him when covered with His dying crimson: it was wrapped about His naked body as a cloak, so that the shame He despised and the cross He endured, looking forward to the recompense of reward.

Observe what His zeal was made of. (1.) It was zeal for God (John ii. 17). (2.) It was also a zeal for truth. (3.) For souls.

III. WHAT WAS IT THAT THE ZEAL OF CHRIST FED UPON?

1. *Christ's zeal was based upon a defined principle.* It was not a hurried hasty

zeal, excited in Him by the earnest addresses of eloquent pleaders; it sprang from fixed and intelligent principles; for He had set His heart upon a great purpose, He had weighed it, counted the cost, looked at it on all sides, and now He was not to be turned from it. 2. *It was occasioned by intense love.* He loved His Father; He could not, therefore, but do His will. He loved His people; He could not, therefore, do otherwise than seek their good. 3. *It had an eye to the recompense* (Heb. xii. 2). Christian, think of the recompense of the faithful servant—not of debt, but of grace. What joy, when you enter heaven, to be met by those who were converted to God through your means; to hear them hail you as their spiritual father or their spiritual mother! 4. Christ was so zealous *because He had a greater spiritual discernment than you and I have.* He beheld the spirits of men; He beheld not their bodies only, but their inner selves; and He looked upon men, not as flesh and blood, but as immortals. Best of all, He saw God. He could say, "I have set the Lord always before me," &c. What a source of zeal this must have been!—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 832.

(α) Behold the altar, built of unhewn stones, and after God's own law; behold the wood laid thereon; see the victim slain and the blood flowing; but you cannot make a sacrifice without fire—unless the fire from heaven shall perfect the sacrificial preparations, all will be useless. Behold in the altar the figure of the man; he has faith, courage, love, consecration; but if he lacks the fire of fervent zeal his life will be a failure; he will remain an offering unconsumed, and consequently worthless and unaccepted.—*Spurgeon.*

(β) The zeal that God would have us cultivate is wise and prudent; it does not headlessly leap into the ditch, though it would swim a river, yea, and the Atlantic to boot, if it felt that God had bidden it do so. Zeal is like fire, which is said to be "a good servant, but a bad master." The fire in the grate who shall say too much in its favour? But fire in the thatch of the house, who shall say too much against it? The flaming fire of zeal, burning and blazing in the soul, is a Christian gift and virtue; but when zeal takes away the judgment, the man does not wear zeal as a cloak, he makes a hood of it, and makes himself brother to a fool—*Spurgeon.*

(γ) What words of love He uses! How gently He addresses the poor trembling ones, as He bids them come unto Him, and they shall have rest. He does not utter those blessed invitations in a sleepy manner, but His heart goes out with every syllable, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And when He turns to sterner oratory, and addresses those enemies of the truth, the Scribes and Pharisees, how He thunders and lightens at them! Were ever such indignant words uttered as those of the Master, "Woe unto ye, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites"! Why, *there* stood the men. He was not speaking *of* them, as I might speak of people who are in Abyssinia or Japan, but there they were, before His eye, gnashing their teeth at Him, looking indignant, and longing to tear Him down and drag Him off to death. But, "woe unto you!" came again from His lips, and yet again "woe unto you! For a pretence ye make long prayers; ye strain at a gnat, and ye swallow a camel." No man could speak more plainly than He did in the face of these hypocrites, for zeal was girt about Him as a cloak, and no fear of man could restrain Him. —*Spurgeon.*

Ver. 17. EXCHANGING CLOAKS.

The cloak, the seamless outer garment of Christ, is constantly used in Scripture as a symbol of certain things to be laid aside, and of others which are to be assumed.

I would speak—I. OF THE CLOAKS THAT ARE CAST OFF BY HIM WHO COMES TO CHRIST. 1. Taught of Christ, you will substitute this zeal of Christ for the *cloak of sin* (John xv. 22) 2. For the cloak of *maliciousness* (1 Pet. ii. 16) 3. For the cloak of *selfishness* (1 Thess. ii. 5) II. THE NEW COSTUME, THE CLOAK WE ARE TO PUT ON—"Clad with zeal as with a cloak." 1. The *material* of this cloak. 2. Its *appearance.* 3. Its *uses.* Let me exhort you to make this change. It can be made now in a *moment* of time.—*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*

Christ the Champion of His people. I. His righteousness. II. His saving power. III. His judicial authority. IV. His unwearying zeal. —*Dr. Lyth.*

SUPPORT AMIDST DANGER.

lix. 19. *When the enemy shall come in like a flood, &c.*

Ever since the moment when the tempter appeared to the woman this world has been the battlefield of good and evil. It is so now. For God did not abandon man. We have here a vivid picture of these two forces. The

standard of heaven is lifted up against the hosts of hell. Without attempting to trace the historic bearing of the text we shall simply apply it to personal Christian experience of spiritual danger and spiritual support.

I. *Let me place before you* YOUR DANGER.

The enemy will come in. The onslaught may be so impetuous as to defy all power of resistance.

1. We remind you of the personal character of your enemy. The struggle for the mastery of human hearts is described in Scripture as a personal struggle. We are warned against a real, living, subtle, wicked, powerful enemy (1 Pet. v. 8). 2. But he attacks usually by means of others.

The world is an instrument of temptation and danger. Its business, customs, &c., are sources of danger. And your weakness in great part arises from the fact that you cannot always rely on your own forces. You carry a traitor within. The battle between good and evil is really fought within our own hearts. It is life and death.

II. *We point out* YOUR SUPPORT.

Read the whole passage. Jehovah exposed the quarrel of His Church with her enemies. This is our encouragement when pressed hard by temptation. 1. The redeeming work of the Son of God has emasculated the power of the enemy. He espoused the cause of humanity, &c. (Heb. ii. 14, 15). 2. He has secured the influence and help of the Holy Spirit. Christ sends His Spirit. (1.) In His Word. (2.) In His personal agency. If there is a Satanic influence acting in the soul there is also a Divine influence. He works within the heart so as to produce the repugnance to the enemy without which we shall not desire his overthrow. By a real, though imperceptible action on the heart, the Spirit of the Lord animates His people so that in the moment of temptation their prevailing disposition is with Him. And He influences the understanding and judgment so that true thoughts and holy motives come to the mind when the enemy comes in. The great truths and motives contained in the written Word—"The sword of the Spirit."

Would you have the standard lifted up against the assaults of Satan? 1. Be acquainted with your exposure and your weakness. Self-confidence insures defeat. 2. Seek the Spirit's help by constant prayer. 3. Watch as well as pray. When God lifts up His standard the victory is sure.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The enemy. I. There is an enemy. II. That enemy has tremendous influence—"like a flood." III. That enemy is unable to overcome the resources of God. *Apply*—1. This promise of the Spirit must not discourage watchfulness, but must—2. Inspire hope.—*J. Parker, D.D.*

I. The foe. II. The onset. III. The defeat.

I. How the adversary assaults us. By error, iniquity, persecution, temptation. II. How the Holy Spirit withstands him. By His Word, providence, grace.

I. The enemy. Invisible, cruel, mighty, skilful, malignant. II. His assault. Sudden, impetuous, overwhelming. III. Our defence. The Spirit of God. Almighty, ever near, watchful, &c.

I. The object of reverence. God's name. God's glory. II. The expression of it. Fear. III. The prevalence of it.—*Dr. Lyth.*

Vers. 20, 21. I. The Redeemer. 1. His person. 2. His work. II. His advent. He comes to Zion, in human flesh. III. The persons specially interested in His coming. IV. The blessings consequent on His coming.

Ver. 21. The New Testament covenant is—I. Inspired by the Holy Spirit. II. Announced by Jesus Christ. III. Enjoyed by His people. IV. Shall be perpetuated for ever (see Barnes' Commentary *in loco*).—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

THE DAWNING OF GOD'S LIGHT, AND ITS AWAKENING CALL.

lx. 1–6. *Arise, shine, for thy light is come, &c.*

We ourselves are a part fulfilment of this prophecy. It is Israel's God we worship, &c. The Church of today is what it is through the fulfilment of this prophecy in part; the Church of the future will be what it shall become through its fulfilment in completeness. Dropping the special refer-

ence to Israel, and viewing the text in its universal bearings, we have—

I. THE CHURCH ENLIGHTENED BY CHRIST'S COMING. Christ rose upon His Church like a great sun, imparting life, reviving courage, diffusing gladness, making bright with glory (Mal. iv. 2). Christ gives light—1. *By imparting saving knowledge* (see p. 569). He taught men of the Father. He showed the way of life. He put into the precepts of the law a depth of spiritual meaning never seen in them before. He could say of Himself (John viii. 12). He came with full knowledge of the Divine purpose. He spake with absolute authority. 2. *By restoring the Church to power and influence.* The godly in Israel were but a handful. They were down-trodden and despised. But Christ would reinstate it in power and influence among the nations; He would give it prosperity. This was bringing it light. Accordingly, a new spring-time came with the advent of the Saviour. He made His Church a power. Its power speedily became felt, and continues to this day. It is a permanent and influential factor in history—a thing of might. 3. *By conferring on the Church the beauty of holiness.* This may answer to the "glory" which the prophet declares "shall be seen upon it." Christ confers a glory on the Church by the spiritual gifts which He bestows, and by the graces which become visible in the character of His people through the operation of His Word and Spirit.

II. THE LIGHT OF THE CHURCH IN CONTRAST WITH THE SURROUNDING DARKNESS. The Church—believers, Christian nations, enlightened by Christ, stand in marked contrast with the darkness of the world around. The effect of the light is to make the darkness more visible. Contrast—1. *The enlightenment of faith with the boasted enlightenment of reason* (1 Cor. i. 21). The world's cleverness did not lead it to the truth. It leads it often to reject the truth now that it has come. The boasted enlightenment of antiquity left it profoundly immoral. The theories, schemes, reasonings of our philosophers to-day leave the mind in just as great uncertainty on the chief questions of existence, and are powerless to effect moral regeneration. 2. *The enlightenment of nations which have received the truth with the darkness of surrounding heathenism.* 3. *The enlightenment of individuals who have obeyed the truth with the darkness of those who are still in sin.* The believer recognises in his own experience that, whereas he was once darkness, he is now light in the Lord. The change in his character manifests this to be true. The unbeliever, on the contrary, knows his state to be one of darkness, of moral evil, of unhappiness; through lack of true knowledge of God, of hopelessness as regards the future.

III. THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AND TO DIFFUSE HER LIGHT (ver. 1, 3). Missionary effort is of the essence of the Church's calling (Mark xvi. 16).—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. pp. 25–27.

Ver. 1. This stirring appeal springs from a soul full of exultant joy. To understand the depth of that exultation, observe that the prophet spoke in a time of the deepest gloom. Chapter lix. depicts the state of cold formalism into which the nation had sunk. In the very heart of that gloom, Isaiah saw a distant light gathering round the vision of the future Saviour (chap. lix. 20). He gazed on the dawning glory, and thence arose the cry, rousing as a trumpet call, "Arise, shine," &c. Taking these words into the full illumination of Christianity, they express, very beautifully, the awakening of a man to his true work in the world. Paul has himself given them that interpretation (Eph. v. 14). Giving to the prophet's words that Christian meaning, they present to us a truth of immense value respecting the Christian's mission in the world It is because the "glory of the Lord has risen on" him, that he is to reflect the light which has entered his soul.

I. THE DAWNING OF THE LIGHT. Man is not in a world of darkness, but *blind* in a world of light. In the

awakening hour we call conversion, God *does seem* to come nearer to the soul. The veil is lifted from the spirit's eye, and His nearness, for the first time, is discovered. The glory of God in Christ is in close contact with every human heart. Our little life is enveloped by the spiritual world. Just as in the opening of the eyes of the man who was blind from his birth, there appeared to him to be created a world of trees and flowers, whose beauty no idea had ever pictured—so in the solemn awakening hour of spiritual life, all the world of God's glory breaks in like a new creation. There are three requisites for the dawning of the light. 1. *Spiritual penitence.* Spiritual, because there is a repentance which is by no means a rising of God's light in the soul, but merely a transient motion. Mere regret and mere terror may be the beginning of the true, but it is not in itself true repentance. True repentance is the turning of the whole heart to God on the discovery of its own darkness and estrangement. Its chief cause is not so much the remembrance of guilty acts, as the feeling of a guilty heart. 2. *Spiritual love.* Spiritual, in contrast with that semi-pious emotion which is always convulsively striving to learn whether the soul loves God or not. Spiritual love is not so much the feeling of our love to God, as of His love to us. It is the love which has swept into the soul, subduing its whole being, and becoming its ruling emotion. This is requisite, because love is the insight of the soul. The man who has not this love is blind to the light of God. 3. *Spiritual prayer.* Spiritual, because living fellowship with the Father is meant. This is the full dawning of the light of God. He who lives in prayer, lives before the unveiled eternity. By penitence, therefore, the soul turns God-wards; by love its eye is opened; and by prayer it moves in the sunrise of the eternal light. This brings us to consider—

II. THE AWAKENING CALL,—"Arise, shine." When God is felt to be near a man thus—in penitence, love, and prayer, that man is imperatively bound to reflect the glory which has risen in his heart; to bear witness of the light which has pierced and transformed his soul. This is based on a great principle, viz., *The deepest emotion in a man's nature must reveal itself in his life.* There is no such thing as a life-long hypocrisy; sooner or later the master passion within will glow to a red heat, and the man will stand transparent before the eye of the world. In what way does the glory of the Lord thus manifest itself in life?

1. *In the majesty of holiness.* Holiness means, literally, separateness—separateness from sin, by dedication to God. Remember, *you* are to shine with that light;—you are to go bearing the glory of the Lord, and of the spiritual world, in your life. 2. *In the beauty of unselfishness.* The life of God is the life of the Cross in the heart. This is a manifestation of God's light in the soul. Let that light dawn, and men will see the Cross-life there. This is the light which the world so much needs to-day. 3. *In the earnestness of your efforts for men.* If the light has risen, you know its power. If the glory has dawned, you feel the realities of life. In that illumination, who can be slothfully calm? There is a spirit of so-called refinement abroad now, which makes men afraid to speak of those things which lie deepest in the heart. Was it so with the great ones of old? Was Paul afraid to speak in the name of Christ before Agrippa? Did he shrink before the fiery scorn of Festus? Go, then, bear witness of the light. Live out your prayers in daily actions.—*E. L. Hull, B.A.: Sermons*, First Series, pp. 61–70.

I. THERE IS A DECLARATION OF FACT: "*Thy light is come.*" This prophecy was fulfilled when Christ was born. But we must pass beyond that fact, and recognise that there is a revelation to ourselves to-day as much as there was of yore. *Thy* light is come. What does it mean? 1. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ was a light to mankind, because it brought

home distinctly as far as the mind could contemplate it *the thought of God* (a). 2. The prophecy is fulfilled in revealing to mankind *the dignity and the destiny of man*. Before the keen logicians, the wonderful thinkers, of Greece and Rome, there is always hanging a great gulf of blank despair. With us, the poorest character that we meet in rags, we in some measure respect. Man is now seen in the light of the faith of Jesus, &c.

II. AN EXHORTATION TO DUTY: *Arise and shine*. Be in active operation with Divine force, and permit the light of God to shine through the soul and life. That applies to the Church. 1. *The Church is a witness of Divine truth*. The Church shines when she witnesses the truth. A modern idea is that the Church is not to be so bigoted as positively to assert the truth. Christ said, "Go ye and teach all nations." When once the Church forgets her function of teaching the truth there will be heard "the beating of the unseen feet," Christ coming in the clouds to judge and to condemn. May He give us grace to recollect and to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. 2. The Church shines when she bears witness to the worship of Almighty God. The Church is the house of prayer, the home of Christian union, the school of souls in their constant intercourse with the Eternal God.

CONCLUSION.—The same truth applies to souls. Shine with the light that has come, is a command for souls more than for the Church. How shall we do it? 1. By keeping steadily before us the severe lines of duty that God lays down for us, and trying to do our duty; seeking grace to do it, &c. We shine when we try to hold the true estimate of character. Unless we are true to ourselves, and true to God, we may make grave mistakes. We must know ourselves by self-examination, by severe and careful watchfulness. It is in penitence, and in the progress that comes from penitence, that the soul shines in the light of Christ. Let us each begin with ourselves and not be content with broad views of Christianity. — *Canon Knox-Little: Clerical World*, vol. i., pp. 310–312.

(a) Even in the Old Testament that thought was most inaccurate. Even in the ancient nations that loved righteousness there was no entire conception of the nature and character of God. One cannot read the "Republic" of Plato, *e.g.*, without being struck with the accuracy of the thoughts and the beauty of the pictures he brings out, with the power of the argument and the keenness of the criticism; and yet through it and above it all with the darkness, and sadness, and despair. God not known; no real grasp of the eternal goodness; no real thought of the eternal life. Christ came and taught men not only by His stately words, but by His loving life, that God is love. Surely when we feel that no rest can be found in a passing life unless we rest upon God, then we acknowledge the truth of the prophet's saying, "Thy light is come."

I. The deep darkness which envelops the world without the Gospel (ver. 2). "Gross darkness," a striking emblem of ignorance, error, sin, guilt, misery, danger. 1. The heathen world is in this darkness (Rom. i. 18–32). 2. In the midst of Christendom there is this darkness. Home heathenism. The condition of the unregenerate.

II. The uprising of a glorious light for the transformation of the darkness. There is no redeeming principle in man's apostate nature. But for the prospect opened by the Gospel, there must be the darkness of final and absolute despair. Modern Materialism, &c., are as powerless as the ancient systems to reach the conscience and renew the heart (ch. xxxviii. 17; xlv. 8, and others). But glorious is the view here presented, &c. 1. The Gospel is "light," and this marks its divinity. 2. The Gospel is universally adapted —(1.) To every stage of human society. (2.) To the common wants of man—instruction, comfort, &c. (3.) To every order of mind. (4.) To every possible condition. The Gospel offers pardon for the guilty, &c. 3. The Gospel is diffusive, penetrating. Its progress in Apostolic times, &c. (ver. 8). Not a dead letter, but "the power of God," &c. In how many dark places has "light sprung up" (Matt. iv. 16). It will be diffused till the whole world is flooded with its glorious light.

Conclusion.—Has the light risen upon *your* soul? Are you reflecting its radiance in your life, &c.? Are you doing what you can to communicate it to others? Every Christian is called upon not only to "arise," but to "shine" (Eph. v. 4). In the radiance of this Divine light the Church is to stand up and show herself, and then the greatest and most blessed results will follow. If your soul is in darkness you need not despair, for LIGHT IS ALL AROUND YOU.—*A. Tucker*.

Words full of inspiration and high hope. Day has dawned upon the world; light and life have come, the day of salvation for all people. Let us consider this new day of salvation in three aspects.

I. How has light arisen upon the world in Jesus Christ? II. How does light arise upon the individual soul that comes to Christ? III. How may the blessed light which has arisen within us, and which has made us children of the light, so be manifested by us in our life that it may run its widening way upon the earth? The claims of foreign missions.—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. pp. 27–35.

I. The auspicious fact. II. The reasonable command.—*J. Rawlinson.*

Ver. 8. The Light. I. Revealed to the Jews. II. Extended to the Gentiles. III. Supreme above all authority and power.

Vers. 4, 5. I. The gathering of the Gentiles to Zion. From every quarter—from far—from beyond the sea. With all their forces. II. Zion's emotions. She sees and overflows with joy.

Vers. 6, 7. The gathering of Zion's children. I. They come from all quarters. II. Come full-handed. III. Come with thanksgiving and praise. IV. Come to offer themselves in the service of the Lord. V. Come to find acceptance. VI. Come to share in the manifestation of the Divine glory.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

The Glory of the Gospel Church.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

lx. 6. *The multitude of camels shall cover thee, &c.*

The primary reference is to the change in Jerusalem after the captivity. Instead of desolation there would be return of the life of a prosperous capital. The merchandise which had deserted it because there was no market would find its way back from all quarters. Arabia would again send its swift camels and dromedaries laden with spices and other products, &c. But glorious as this primary reference to material prosperity, it is surpassed by the secondary. Many of the terms can only be understood as contemplating the glory of the Gospel Church, which was to arise in consequence of the appearance of the Messiah and the accomplishment of His long-predicted work. View the text in this light, and observe some circumstances respecting the converts of the Gospel.

I. They shall be drawn from an extended area.

Keeping in view the wide geographical sweep of this chapter, it cannot be regarded as saying less than that the converts of the Gospel shall be derived from all the ends of the earth. Christianity is the true gospel of humanity. 1. It is needed by man universally. 2. It is adequate to man. 3. It is adapted to man. 4. It is intended for man.

II. They shall come numerously to its attraction.

The prophet sees in vision these multitudes coming from various quarters. What is the centre to which they are attracted by an invisible but irresistible power? It is Christ (John xii. 32). Already, to a large extent, has this declaration been fulfilled. What multitudes have come to Him during many ages! In connection with the modern missionary enterprise, there is no quarter of the world from which representatives are not, in growing numbers, coming to the cross.

III. They shall bring their offerings to His feet.

They receive, indeed, a free salvation. But it is not intended to minister to their selfishness. It aims to destroy the old selfishness by the excitement of gratitude and love. Love wishes to requite the benefactor. Moreover, the experience of Christ's salvation, contact with His love, begets a corresponding benevolence, which looks forth to the needs of others. "They shall bring gold and incense." Each country and each man brings his own proper production and possession, and lays it at the feet of Him who emptied Himself of His riches for us. In the light of His redeeming love let each ask, "How much owest thou unto my Lord?"

IV. They shall contribute to the celebration of His praise.

Is not praise the expression of joyfulness? Is not joyfulness the experience of the Church when most fully consecrated to Christ? They shall show it—1. By their songs. The first

love of the Church expressed itself in songs of praise. So did the Reformation. So does every revival. Missionary converts speedily develop a love of sacred song. 2. By their lives. The changed life of every convert that walks consistently with his new profession is a perpetual showing forth of God's praise. The worldling, the impure, the indifferent, the idolater changed. 3. By their testimony. In their turn testify for God and the Gospel. From personal experience speak confidently. Every separate convert a fresh seed of salvation.

By coming to Christ, consecration to Christ, living to His praise, will this be fulfilled.—*J. Rawlinson.*

The Honour ascribed to the Church.

lx. 7. *I will glorify the house of My glory.*

Revelation has been gradual. Isaiah's prophecies refer, first, to Judea and its inhabitants; but as he goes on they become much more general in their application: they reveal to us the glory of the Redeemer—the depth of His humiliation and sufferings, the greatness of His exaltation, the extension of His kingdom to the uttermost parts of the earth. Notice two things—

I. The Place. The prophet refers immediately to the temple at Jerusalem. This was known by the name of the house of the glory of God. God intended that when the Jews settled, a place should be erected for His worship. The design of building a house to contain the emblems of the Divine glory was conceived by David, and announced by him to Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. vii. 2, 3). The prophet, however, afterwards received command to the contrary (2 Sam. vii. 5, 6, 12, 13). In due time Solomon announced his design to Hiram (1 Kings v. 3–5). It was in consequence of this determination that a building was erected in a style of unparalleled splendour. A proclamation was issued to assemble the tribes at its celebration. The holy things were brought, and placed in the holy place (1 Kings viii. 10). In this way, and by the prayers and praises which were continually offered in it, this house became the place of the glory of God. There the Shechinah dwelt for ages; there sacrifices were offered; there were given the tokens of direction, of protection, and of the glory of God. These things stood in a symbolical and representative character. So that the "house" here spoken of refers to the Gospel Church. We do not stretch the comparison too far, if we call the Church of God, "the house of His glory." Such an application is not below the design of Isaiah. Such, too, is the representation of Ezekiel (xlvii. 1–12). So in Zechariah (vi. 12). Malachi also (iii. 1). Reference may also be made to the writings of the apostles on this point (Eph. ii. 19–22; 1 Tim. iii. 15; 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5). All who are called by Divine grace are to be regarded as the Church or House of God. And to these collectively the prophet refers, when he records the determination of Jehovah, "I will glorify the house of My glory.'

But for what reasons, or with what propriety may the Christian Church be called the house of the glory of God? Chiefly on these accounts—1. *Because it is planned and built by the purpose and power of the Most High.* The Christian Church, no less than the ancient temple, was built according to the mind and will of God.

2. *Because it contains the special manifestations of the Divine presence and glory.* In the temple there were special emblems of God's presence. We trace the glory of God in all around us (Ps. xix. 1–3). But to display His glory in the Church, He uses means which make all these comparatively obscure. (1.) Christ Himself is the exact image of God (John i. 14; 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6; Col. i. 15; Heb. i. 3). The perfect representation of God is made in the person, and cross, and work of Jesus Christ.

This glory is seen also (2) in the gifts and influences of the Holy Spirit. The ministration of the Spirit is called the ministration of glory. As in the temple, the Shechinah dwelt in the holiest of all, so the Spirit dwells in the hearts of true believers, as the Spirit of glory and of God (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17; 2 Cor. vi. 16). (3.) By the development of the Divine glory in the preaching of the Word. Is it not a fact, that during the last eighteen hundred years, more has been done by the Gospel of Christ than had been done for four thousand years previous to its introduction. And He will be seen more and more till that time shall come when "the whole earth," &c.

II. The Promise. God glorified the house of His glory in the first temple, by making it an object of beauty and glory to all His people, and by causing it to excite the admiration of surrounding nations; and still further, by sending Christ finally to minister in that temple. God will glorify the house of His glory—

1. *By accepting the services and offerings which, in connection with it, are rendered.* Formerly He accepted sacrifices in the temple and so glorified it (Ezek. xx. 40, 41). No place whatever was honoured by the Divine presence, which was not so dedicated to Him. This is the connection in which the text stands (vers. 6, 7). Sacrifices are abolished in the Gospel Church, because the Great Sacrifice has been offered (John i. 29; 1 Cor. v. 7; Heb. x. 14, ix. 12). Christ was the great victim slain at the dedication of the Gospel

Temple on Calvary. In virtue of this sacrifice, all Christians are accepted, and their offerings (1 Pet. ii. 5; Heb. xiii. 15; Ps. li. 17; Rom. xii. 1; xv. 16; Phil. iv. 18).

2. *By making it the place of special communion and fellowship with Himself.* It was when the priest entered the holiest of all, that God spake with him, and testified His acceptance of the offerings of the people, and issued His various commands (Exod. xxv. 21, 22). All are now priests before God, and to each one God condescends to talk (Heb. x. 19–22; Eph. ii. 18).

3. *By protecting it permanently against all the efforts of hostile powers.* The temple at Jerusalem stood only as long as the people were obedient. But the promise in the text is permanent in reference to the Church at large (vers. 16–18). The foundation of God standeth sure. And what are the grounds on which our belief in its security rests? (1.) Upon the purpose of God. (2.) Upon the promise of God. The purpose is an abstract of His will; and the promise is an intimation and illustration of that will (Matt. xvi. 18). (3.) Upon the special superintendence of God (Zech. ii. 5, 8).

4. *By extending its influence, and increasing its celebrity in the earth* (vers. 4–6, 8, 9). Its glory has been increasing since its foundation was laid. And thus Jerusalem shall become "the praise of the whole earth."

5. *By consummating it finally, in the splendour and happiness of heaven.* This world is to suffer a last, decisive change (2 Pet. iii. 10). But still the Gospel Temple shall not be destroyed (Rev. xxi. 22–27).

APPLICATION.—This is a subject concerning glory—the glory of the Gospel of God, the glory of the Church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Christ Himself is the chief corner stone. Is this glory lighted up in your hearts? Have you passed from death unto life? If you have not now the light of grace, you will go from gloom to gloom. The Spirit's influence is a necessity of your nature, "Ye must be born again."—*James Parsons: Pulpit*, vol. iv. pp. 145–151.

THE SURPRISING INCREASE OF THE CHURCH.

lx. 8. *Who are these that fly as a cloud? &c.*

God is here represented as addressing His Church (ver. 1). In the text the Church breaks in upon the description in the language of wonder and surprise. In order to bring out the meaning of these words, let us notice,

I. THE MOVEMENT WHICH IS HERE STATED. It is a flight. The expression is intended to signify the coming of men from the distant regions of the earth to the Church of God, of which such glorious things are here said. As to the original condition of the persons who are here said to fly, they are described as having forsaken God—as having departed from God, as having wandered from God, and consequently as being in circumstances of distress and misery; as "aliens" from God—"enemies to God by wicked works." The movement spoken of signifies that state into which these men are transformed, and in which they come to the enjoyment of the designs of mercy. It is the renunciation of all that is opposed to God and to salvation; it is their coming back to "the Shepherd and Bishop of souls." Note further, that it is under the Gospel dispensation that this is to be exemplified. The Gospel contains a clear development of the Divine law; it reveals man's transgression of that law; it points out man's exposure to the wrath of God; and it contains in it all that is suited to bring men back to God: it proclaims the great atoning sacrifice, by faith in which the guilty are pardoned, the unholy purified, the endangered protected, and the lost redeemed.

It is implied also that Divine influence must be imparted to effect this. Nothing can be done without the Spirit. This statement should ever be seen in the foreground of our theology. Where the Spirit is not, there can be no accomplishment of the designs and purposes of eternal love. This change arises from the statements of Gospel truth as they are contained in the written Word. The Spirit uses His own words (Eph. vi. 17). It is the preaching of the Cross of Christ—the uplifting of the Saviour, that contributes to the salvation of sinners; the preaching of the Cross is therefore called "the power of God." How important, then, that this Gospel should be spread both at home and abroad! how important to pray for the outpourings of Divine influence! But

II. WHAT IS INTENDED BY THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS MOVEMENT IS SAID TO BE MADE? Much interesting matter is furnished by these figures. We shall, perhaps, enter into the spirit of them in reference to the return of sinners to God, by considering them as implying—1. *Eagerness.* The clouds are supposed to be driven by the wind to one point, and the doves hasten with speed to their home. This eagerness is a most important symptom of conversion. Take the following examples (Matt. xi. 12; Luke xviii. 13; xxiii. 42; Acts ii. 37; xvi. 29, 30). And is there not reason for this eagerness? Consider: the knowledge of guilt; the fear of danger; the prospect of security and the hope of privilege impels us to flee. 2. *Number.* The cloud is an emblem of number. The number of witnesses to the power of faith are described by the Apostle as "a great cloud of witnesses." The other figure of doves refers also to a great number. This chapter refers to the great accessions which the Church in after ages should receive (vers. 4–7). The mercy of God was to go forward to the boundaries of the habitable globe (ch. xlix. 5, 6, 22, 23). Christ re-stated this grand fact (Matt. viii. 11; xxiv. 14; Mark xvi. 15). Look at the history of the progress of the

Gospel. In early times it extended itself rapidly. In one day three thousand converts were made; and the word of God "grew mightily, and prevailed" (2 Cor. x. 4, 5). The temples of heathen superstition were deserted, the Gospel in all its truth and purity was established: and how many myriads have since been gathered! Predicted universal triumph. 3. *Unity.* The clouds are supposed to fly in one body, and to be driven to one part of the horizon; the doves fly together to attain one home. So it will be with all who have been conducted by the Spirit into the way of life everlasting. There may be a number of differences among the people of God; but they seek the same salvation; they are influenced by the same principles; they depend on the same atonement; they are clothed in the same righteousness; they partake of the same Spirit; they obey the same commandments; they hope in the same promises; they are heirs of the same inheritance. Observe how the diversity in unity is stated by Paul (1 Cor. xii. 4–13). Note the importance attached to unity (Eph. iv. 3–6; Col. iii. 11).

III. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE INQUIRY WHICH THE CONTEMPLATION OF THIS MOVEMENT EXCITES? The words are expressive of the emotions—

1. *Of surprise.* The passage is very analogous to ch. xlix. 20, 21. It could not but be surprising to witness the change from feebleness to strength, from solitariness to multitude, from lowliness to empire. Contemplating modern times, are we not ready to exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" Contemplate the future in the same spirit.

2. *Of joy.* Surprise is mingled with joy There is joy over the conversion of every sinner. And why? Because of the honour given by this means to the Church. Because of the immense accession to the peace and happiness of mankind. Because of the complete restoration of the honours of Jehovah. Here is the prospect of the establishment of His kingdom "who is the Lord God Omnipotent."—*James Parsons: Pulpit*, vol. viii. pp. 433–441.

Ver. 9. I. God's sons must be gathered. II. The means are at hand. Ships; silver and gold—all useful in God's cause. III. The centre of power and attraction. The Holy One of Israel (see p. 550). IV. The agency by which this power is exerted. The Church—which He has glorified and will.

Ver. 10. I. God has often just cause to be angry with His people. II. Smites them in His wrath. III. Has mercy on them. IV. Finally subdues their enemies and makes them minister to them.

Ver. 11. The future of the Church. I. Open gates. Implying peace, constant accessions. II. Abundant resources. The forces of the Gentiles—their wealth, intellect, knowledge, every earthly good consecrated. III. Honour and dominion. The noblest will minister to her. The State will not rule the Church, but the Church sanctify and guide the State by the influence of its teaching.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

NECESSITY OF RELIGION TO THE WELL-BEING OF A NATION.

lx. 12. *The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish, &c.*

I. True religion is essential to the welfare of a nation. But what is human welfare? What is that state to which we can, with full satisfaction, attach the idea of well-being? In a word—what is happiness, that object which all desire, and seek and strive to obtain, &c.? Legislation, &c., will not affect the solid welfare of a nation. Facts confirm what reason had anticipated, that true religion is the only foundation of a nation's welfare. The reasons of the fact arise from the very nature of the case in the operation of moral causes. What the religion of the Gospel teaches and does, &c.

II. By what means may we most effectively endeavour to realise the welfare of our country, and that as the fruit of its religion? All Christians are called to promote the conversion of sinners, the more expansive holiness of believers, and the universal glory of their Lord: in a word, to make the nation Christian, by making the persons who compose the nation such. Respecting the selection and application of the particular methods for this purpose, the new Testament allows very great latitude provided that grand principles be preserved—(1) Spirituality; (2) simplicity; (3) liberty.—*J. P. Smith, D.D., LL.D.: Pulpit Memorials*, pp. 59–75.

THE PLACE OF GOD'S FEET GLORIOUS.

lx. 13. *I will make the place of My feet glorious.*

These promises, while serving the purpose of sustaining the heart of God's faithful people throughout their dismal captivity, took a far grander

range than *their* restoration and revival, &c.

I. THE SCENE OF THIS SPECIAL DIVINE GLORY. "The place of My feet." This is the language of figure, but plain and intelligible. God has no bodily parts, yet the sacred writers speak of His eye, &c., as indicating His personal presence. Such language deceives no one, and it gives a lively representation of the actual spiritual fact. "The place of God's feet," or His "footstool," was in ancient times the temple (1 Chron. xxviii. 2). This was His rest, where He had chosen to put His name, where in a special sense Jehovah dwelt between the Cherubim over the mercy-seat. The allusion is to a royal throne. God's throne is in heaven, but His footstool in the earthly temple whither His subjects repair. It was for Israel the place of reception, of communion, and of worship. And all this was in turn a figure of the better things reserved for us. No place of worship on earth may claim to be, in preference to others, the footstool of Jehovah. The true Church, composed of all believers of whatever name or nation, is God's temple, "the place of His feet." It is no particular altar or edifice; it is the living stones. In a real sense the wide earth is His footstool, marked by the footprints of His glory; but it is in the new creation that he has given the most perfect manifestation of His glory.

II. THE GLORY OF THE SCENE. It was the glory of Eden that God talked there with man, and it is the glory of the Church that it has the clearest manifestations of His presence and grace. 1. *The worship there rendered and accepted.* 2. *The glory that is there created* (ver. 13). Many can see no glory in the Church. They admire the beauty of the palace, the splendour of a mighty monarchy, but conclude that the Church has no glory. This is not to be wondered at: they see only what they have the power of seeing—they have no spiritual discernment. The true purpose of the Church is to be a living witness, an embodied protest against money-worship, &c. Her grandest glory consists in the image of Christ: she is the true home of holiness. 3. *The multitudes attracted to her.* The Gospel is for the world, and the Church is the light-bearer. In proportion as she is healthy will she bestir herself in this great service of humanity, and commend the Gospel by her own high-toned character (vers. 1, 2). The nations come to her in procession (vers. 8, 9). This is a spiritual movement, the approach of souls, the submission of hearts to Christ, and much of it is already fact. 4. *The blessedness there conferred*—the blessedness of inviolable *security* (vers. 12, 18). A nation not in alliance with God has a canker eating at the heart of its power. What vitality the Church has shown! How vainly the powers of earth have conspired to trample her down! What is the ground of this security? Not her own strength but God's salvation. Hers is the glory of *purity.* Let the world see that the Church is what she claims to be—a society unselfish and benevolent. As she is holy she will be *joyful.* She has forsaken the pleasures of sin, and unless she has the joy of salvation, she has no comfort of any kind. Let us partake of the true joy, and we will walk in the light of God's face; and that joy will prove a grand attraction to the nations of the world, and reveal to them a blessedness which the world cannot bestow.—*John Riddell Moffat: Discourses*, pp. 222–241.

Ver. 14. I. The sorrows of Zion. Afflicted. Despised. II. Their relief. By the subjection of her foes. By the acknowledgment of her claims. By the presence and favour of God.

Vers. 15–22. The happy condition of Zion. I. Temporal blessings. Once forsaken and despised, now held in universal honour. All the advantages of commerce, civilisation, and wealth. Just government—peace and protection. II. Spiritual blessings. Knowledge of God and Christ. Salvation. Divine light and comfort. Universal righteousness. Permanent increase.

Vers. 15, 16. I. The desolations of Zion. II. Her restoration. III. Prosperity. IV. Acknowledgment of God.

Vers. 16, 17. Iron. I. All things must be laid under contribution for the accomplishment of the Divine purpose in His Church. All the achievements of the human mind. All the

conveniences of wealth and civilisation. All the influence of human power. II. In the subjection and sanctification of human resources God develops His own character in relation to His Church. As Saviour, Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Vers. 17, 18. The exaltation of the Church secures the best interests of a nation. I. Social peace and order. II. Honesty and integrity in the transactions of business and commerce. III. Protection from violence within and foes without. IV. Happiness in the blessings of salvation, and the spirit of praise.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Earthly Darkness and Heavenly Light.

lx. 20. *Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon, &c.*

No one who is capable of appreciating the higher forms of poetry can refuse to pay a tribute of admiration to this magnificent chapter. It is a rapturous ode congratulating Zion on her restoration to heavenly favour, &c. Much of the chapter can only be interpreted spiritually. The text can never be true of this world. The parallelism of this verse.

I. On earth our moon withdraws itself. 1. There is great propriety in the figure which makes the light of the moon an emblem of earthly joy. The sun's light is in a sense his own, not so the moon. As the light of the sun is essential, so are the joys which come direct from God; as the light of the moon is borrowed and reflected, so is the joy that springs from earthly things. The things of earth have no inherent power of giving happiness. 2. There is equal propriety in saying of the "days of our mourning" that the moon withdraws itself. Our troubles come in two ways—(1.) By the removal of our pleasant things. (2.) Our pleasant things are left, but the joy of them is gone. 3. Our days of mourning, like the moon's withdrawing itself, are often sources of the greatest profit. Nothing helps reflection like trouble and sorrow. The loss of earthly joy makes heavenly hopes more bright.

II. On earth our sun goes down. 1. We may compare the light of the sun to the joy which the soul receives from communion with God. The light of the sun is light from the highest source of light; and the joy of Divine communion is joy from the highest source of joy. 2. On earth the sun of the soul may go down—our heavenly prospect become clouded.

III. For the sincere Christian, the obscurations that occasionally take place on earth are only temporary. 1. The causes that lead to the obscuring of our spiritual joys will be removed—clouds, shadow, night, &c. What must it be to be there? 2. And with this highest and purely spiritual glory shall be associated in the sublimest perfection all elements of the happiness that is secondary and subordinate. Ended shall be the hours of earthly anxiety, &c. Upon all the glory there shall be a defence, the defence of immortality. To which of the two worlds are you tending, &c.?—*Frederick Greeves, D.D.*

Ver. 20. It is the purpose of God to grant larger manifestations of His grace and more copious outpourings of His Spirit in order to fulfil these delightful prophecies, and bring on even on earth golden days, &c. But the text manifestly points to heaven, as there only can it be completely and for ever verified (Rev. xxi. 23). In this description of heaven we observe two things—

I. The total absence of all the evils we deplore on earth. Our text tells us what this life is, and what the life to come shall be, and plainly contrasts one state with the other. Now, joy and sorrow are blended; light and darkness are intermixed, &c. We are scarcely aware how necessary these vicissitudes and variations are. We forget that night is as necessary as the day. Morning never breaks so beautifully as after a tempestuous night, &c. These changes are the marks and indications of an imperfect dispensation of things, and they often present serious obstructions to our happiness and repose. We have a sun, but that sun goes down; we have a moon, but that moon withdraws itself; we have light, but that light is clouded and incomplete; we have days upon days, but they are often days of mourning, &c. Heaven, therefore, is beautifully described as exhibiting the total absence of all the evils we deplore, &c. No infirmity of body, &c. They are for ever gone, and if remembered at all, shall be remembered only as a ground of triumph that they are no more, &c.

II. The perpetual enjoyment of all the good we desire. God Himself shall constitute the immediate felicity of His children.

1. Knowledge without obscurity. 2. Holiness without sin. 3. Communion without weariness. 4. Happiness without alloy.

III. THE INFLUENCE THIS PROSPECT SHOULD EXERT. 1. Secure a title to it, and a meetness for it. 2. Guard against the temptations and sins that often embitter the changes of this life. 3. Aim to take as many with you as you can. 4. Remember you may be much nearer to it than you expect. What is your hope, &c.?—*Samuel Thodey.*

Ver. 20. Never was a picture of national happiness described in more glowing colours than in this verse. It can only be completed in heaven. I. A MELANCHOLY SKETCH OF THE LIFE THAT NOW IS. And is it not a faithful sketch? Let us inquire into—1. Some of the *sources* of human calamity. Some suffer from the afflictions—(1.) Of the mind. (2.) Body. (3.) Worldly disappointments. (4.) Family afflictions. (5.) Bereavement. Thus days of mourning are allotted to all. The cup goes round. 2. Some of the *reasons* why these are permitted under the government of a wise, righteous, gracious God. To imbitter sin, to discipline and mature the character, to wean from the world, and conform to Christ. 3. Some of the *consolations* which the Gospel furnishes under them. Our sorrows are attended by many consolations. We are supported by many promises, &c. II. A DELIGHTFUL ANTICIPATION OF THE LIFE TO COME. In a future life our pains and sorrows cease. When our sorrow ceases positive happiness begins. 1. The presence of God. In this life God blesses us mediately—by channels of mercy, &c.; but in heaven immediately—He Himself will be the source of our bliss. 2. The absence of all sources of disquiet. Sin, sorrow, &c. 3. The communication of happiness suited to our nature. 4. Perpetuity gives the final charm. —*S. Thodey.*

Ver. 21. I. The promise. Includes the ultimate prevalence of righteousness. The consequent increase of human enjoyment. II. The security of it. God will accomplish it, for the revelation of His own glory.

Ver. 22. The growth of God's kingdom. I. The small proportion which the Church bears to the world. II. The promised enlargement. In numbers and influence. III. The certain and speedy accomplishment of this promise. God will bring it to pass. Will hasten it—in His time.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

THE SIGNS OF A TRUE MINISTRY.

lxi. 1–3. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, &c.*

This word, in all the beauty and grace of its meaning, was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ; yet it may be regarded as setting forth the signs of a true service for the Kingdom of God, whether rendered by an individual labourer or by the Church in its collective capacity. Looked at in this light, the text becomes solemn as a judgment-seat, and terrible as the vision of God. It declares—

I. THAT THE TRUE MINISTRY IS ALWAYS INSPIRED AND DIRECTED BY THE HOLY GHOST.

That our service may be animated by the Holy Spirit, and should express Divine ideas and purposes, is clear, from the consideration that ours is not an earthly ministry contemplating earthly matters. In working out religious ideas and Christian purposes, it is not the man who has the longest head that can always do the most good; it is the man who says—and says in reverence and humility—"I am but a vessel, an instrument, an agent; I am not the master, I am but a servant; Lord God, be thou my inspiration, my strength, and the completeness of my power!" (1 Cor. ii. 14). Our service at home, in the school, &c., ought to be more intensely spiritual. Spiritual character, vitality, will exercise a subtle influence, intensify, and extend. Have we the Holy Ghost?

II. THAT THE TRUE MINISTRY IS ANIMATED BY THE SUBLIMEST BENEVOLENCE.

Throughout the statement of the prophet, there is a tone of kindliness, benevolence, sympathy, gentleness, pity for all human sorrow. The keynote of the Gospel is joy; the watchword of the Gospel is liberty. A ministry that interprets human sorrow downward is not of God (*α*).

III. THAT THE TRUE MINISTRY, WHETHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE, NEVER SHRINKS FROM ITS MORE AWFUL FUNCTIONS (ver. 2).

Without a day of vengeance human history would not be merely poetically incomplete, but morally imperfect. All trampled rights demand a day of vengeance. Peace is impossible so long as impurity is in existence. The day of vengeance will be spiritual (*β*).

APPLICATION.—Let us often stand before this text as before a judgment-seat. Have we the Holy Ghost, or is ours but a feeble testimony we have learnt from teachers that have no claim to Divine inspiration? Are we a joy to all that mourn, &c.? are we a terror to evil-doers, &c.?—*Joseph Parker, D.D., City Temple*, pp. 397–404.

(α) The great appeal which Christianity makes to the world is this:—"I come to make human life freer, grander, purer; I come to open worlds in which human life can be more perfectly developed; I come to set man towards man in the relation of brother towards brother; to break the chains of human captivity; to dispel intellectual and moral darkness, and to bring in an unending summer day:" and any religion that comes with a profession of that kind, even were it nothing more, will, *primâ facie*, demand to be heard as possibly for God.—*Dr. Parker.*

(β) You cannot beat a man with rods, and cause him to suffer to the utmost extremity of his capability; you cannot whip a man with cords till you have whipped him enough: every man must be his own scourge. The Spirit of God must be so revealed in a man that he will see himself as he really is, and pronounce his own sentence upon himself, so that he shall turn himself away from heaven, and from life, and from God, and from saints, and say, "Yes, it is right; I ought not to be there." When a man gives way so, when his heart collapses, when he says to God, "Yes, I am visited with Thy judgments: they are right and true altogether," that is the day of vengeance.—*Dr. Parker.*

THE DIVINE PREACHER. "Of whom saith the prophet this?" I. THE SPEAKER. Doubtless Isaiah was called to comfort the exiles in Babylon. But this language is too elevated to apply to him. The speaker is "the servant of Jehovah," the Messiah. Jesus, when at Nazareth, appropriated the words to Himself (Luke iv. 18, &c.) Though to all appearance a poor, unlettered peasant, Jesus was appointed to fulfil so high a function. What an evidence of His divinity! II. IN WHOSE NAME AND WITH WHAT AUTHORITY DOES HE SPEAK? 1. The *qualification*. The Spirit was given without measure—the Spirit of wisdom, of compassion, of help. 2. The *commission*. The Lord "anointed Him." Approved, sanctioned, prospered by the Lord, He must needs possess the attractiveness and the authority ascribed to Him. This is the explanation of His incomparable power. III. TO WHOM DOES HE SPEAK? To the meek, &c. IV. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE MESSAGE? Good tidings, &c. 1. Of the Father's interest and care. 2. Of His purpose of salvation. 3. Of redemption, as expressing and carrying out Divine intentions of grace. 4. Of spiritual riches, which the poor of this world might possess. 5. Of everlasting life and happiness.

APPLICATION.—1. Accept Christ's offers of grace! 2. Publish the compassion of this Divine Messiah!—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. pp. 123, 124.

I. *The moral disease—broken-heartedness.*

By the broken-hearted, I understand those who, in the language of Scripture, "sorrow after a godly sort;" whose grief is occasioned by sin, in some one of its endlessly varied forms. It may be best understood by a reference to one or two examples—presenting it in its causes, and in its effects and outward features. Brokenness of heart is often the result—1. Of the presence of guilt upon the conscience (Ps. xxxii. 3, 4, xxxviii. 1–8). 2. Of a continued feeling of sin, in its strength in the nature (Rom. vii. 23, 24). 3. Of God's dealings with the soul, in order to recover it from backsliding (Ps. li.; Jer. xxxi. 18, 19). 4. Of seeing sin prevailing in the Church, and among the people of God (Jer. xxiii. 9). 5. Of a season of desertion (Ps. lxxvii. 1–9). 6. Of the reproaches, and calumnies, and persecutions of the wicked (Ps. lxix. 20). If broken-hearted, is it through the sorrow of this life, or sin?

II. *The Physician.*

1. The sympathy which leads to the healing of the broken-hearted is with God. There are other comforters. 2. He who has come to heal is peculiarly qualified, by His nature and by His experience, for sympathising with the afflicted—the Spirit, the "Comforter." 3. The balm which the Physician applies differs according to the different causes of brokenness of heart. (1.) If unpardoned guilt—the blood and righteousness of Christ (Heb. ix. 14). (2.) If unsubdued sin—grace, and strength, and purity, secured in the covenant (Ezek. xxxvi. 25). (3.) If backsliding—the tokens of reconciliation (Luke xv. 22–24). (4.) If desertion and darkness—support of faith (Isa. l. 10), restoration of God's presence. (5.) If prevailing iniquity—the Sovereignty of God. He can vindicate His glory. He will yet do so.

I. *The condition of men by nature—they are captives.*

1. Men are not now in their original and native country. The captive, though born in bondage, yet looks away to his fatherland. That man is not in his native and original condition is evident. (1.) This is an historical fact—recorded. (2.) The evidence of this is to be found in the very nature of man himself—for, He must have a god, and worship. He bears a conscience, recognising another law than that which he is under. He is still in a state of progression. 2. The expression "captives" has a reference to the manner in which men became foreigners. There are but two ways

in which any can pass into bondage—through war and stratagem, or through being sold. 3. The expression of the text leads us to look to the state and character of man for the features of captivity. (1.) Like the captive and slave, man has lost his freedom. He is in bondage to sin—to the flesh—to the world. (2.) Like the captive and slave, man has lost his dignity. Of position—as a king's son. Of character—as Godlike. Of employment—as a worshipper of, and a fellow-worker with, God. (3.) Like the captive and slave, he has lost his courage—denying God, he dreads man. (4.) Like the captive and slave, there are given to him hard and unrewarded tasks. He is made to fight against God—to destroy himself—to violate conscience. (5.) Like the captive and slave, he is miserable.

II. *The object and office of Christ.*

1. Before accomplishing the actual deliverance of man from his captivity, Christ procures the reversal of his sentence of banishment (Gen. iii. 24). 2. Before, &c., Christ had to ransom man as a lawful captive, passive. "Ransomed"—"redeemed"—"bought," &c. 3. In order that men may be delivered, Christ overthrows the power which has led them captive, and keeps them enslaved (Matt. xii. 29; Col. ii. 15; Ps. lxviii. 18). 4. Having crushed the oppressor, Christ leads forth His people from their captivity (Isa. xxxv. 10, xlix. 25). 5. This He does through preaching (2 Cor. x. 4, 5). 6. That believers are the Lord's freemen, is manifest in their character and conduct.

I. *The time—"the acceptable year of the Lord."*

1. Reference is here made to the sabbatical year of the Jews, and especially to the Jubilee (Lev. xxv. 8–17) (*a*). 2. While this law served important political and religious purposes among the Jews, it was typical of the Christian dispensation (Luke iv. 21). 3. As the Jubilee was ushered in by trumpets, so was the Christian dispensation by preaching. Christ is said to have died at the commencement of the last Jubilee observed. 4. We have thus a perpetual Jubilee, and a perpetual sounding of trumpets (Rom. x. 15).

II. *The circumstances which render this year, or season, acceptable or joyous.*

If we advert to the year of Jubilee, these will become apparent.

III. *The ground on which this year, or season, has become acceptable.*

1. The ground of its being acceptable is suggested in Lev. xxv. 9. It commenced on the day of atonement. 2. By His work of atonement Christ has procured—(1.) The remission of sins (Acts xiii. 38, 39). (2.) Deliverance from prison and bondage (Gal. v. 1). (3.) Our lost inheritance (Eph. i. 13, 14). (4.) He has produced mutual love (John xiii. 34, 35). 3. It is only in Christ that the privileges of this year can be offered—that you can reach them. These blessings are as free to all, as were those of the Jubilee to the Jews.

IV. *The acceptable season is limited—a year.*

1. The whole Gospel dispensation, which must come to a close. 2. This life, as respects individuals. There are no years in hell. It matters not to those there, that there is grace here. 3. See that it mean not something still shorter—the season of the strivings of God's Spirit.

Practical lessons.—1. That we come to God *in Christ*—immediately. 2. That we sound the silver trumpet of the Gospel, and proclaim the Jubilee of the world.

I. *A leading employment of Christ as Mediator*—preaching. 1. The grand instrument for establishing this kingdom. 2. Christ still fulfils this inspired declaration variously. By the inspired writings—often alone. By a standing ministry. By the lives of consistent believers, &c. 3. Look to Christ as your teacher. 4. Seek to be an instrument, or mouth to Christ. II. *The subject of Christ's preaching*—"the Gospel." III. *The persons to whom Christ preached.—James Stewart: Outlines*, pp. 17–28.

The world seems to echo and re-echo with the groans of the suffering. We can form no adequate conception of the widespread misery that exists. Surely, if ever there was a time when Messiah could prove the power of His grace to comfort those who suffer it is now. Has He given such proof? Let facts speak. See the dying who have heeded His story. In our own experience we find no helper in sorrow like the Lord. In health and prosperity we may undervalue His succouring grace; but whenever we are brought into circumstances of sore distress, we find no arm but His can support us.

I. He is an *appreciative* comforter. Strictly speaking, Jesus is the only appreciative comforter. We wish to be, but fail through incapacity. Let us not say, "No one knows what I feel." He knows the very degree, &c. II. He is a *sympathetic* comforter—suffers with us. III. He is a *wise* comforter. IV. The main truth is, He is an *intelligent* comforter.

It is He alone that brings to us the true explanation of suffering. The world without Him regard it as a penal arrangement; Christ shows us sorrow is discipline; that those who suffer most should be the best. We had never found this out apart from revelation. Whatever nature shrinks from we deem obnoxious. Take heed lest you miss the blessing of woe. Sorrow is discipline. Those who suffer most become the worst, unless they become the best. The child who is corrected either becomes more obedient or more wayward. Christ shows us sorrow is not misfortune. In the article of sorrow, spiritual prosperity may be as great as at any other time. Amidst the wildest storm the vessel may be borne on a strong current towards the desired haven. The most fertilising rain may descend at midnight. In the seven-time heated furnace the Hebrews walked with God.—*Stems and Twigs*: second series, pp. 255–257.

CHRIST'S MISSION. I. The great distinction

in which our Lord exulted. II. The great message our Lord had to deliver. III. The great work our Lord had to accomplish.—*J. P. Chown: Christian World Pulpit*, vol. x., pp. 49–52.

I. The anointing of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit communicated. The manner. The measure. II. The object for which He was anointed.—*Studies for the Pulpit*, Part I., pp. 318–320.

I. The qualification. II. Work. III. Aim of a true minister of Christ.—*Dr. Lyth.*

I. The auspicious day on which the Jubilee commenced. II. The valuable privileges the Jubilee secured. III. The publicity with which the Jubilee was announced.—*J. Rawlinson.*

(*a*) The allusion in these words is to the Jewish year of Jubilee. The evangelical sense of the term, as it is to be here understood, is confirmed by the fact that when the Saviour preached in the synagogue this was His text, and He announced the fulfilment of the prophecy from the advent of the dispensation of the Gospel.

The Jewish year of Jubilee was a political institution intended for wise purposes. It was to prevent the oppression of the poor, to guard against the miserly accumulations of the rich, and to preserve the ancient patrimony of families, notwithstanding personal reverses, as a sort of inalienable entail. As in the year of Jubilee all slaves that had sold themselves, in the liquidation of their debts into bondage were liberated, and all property that had been temporarily alienated reverted to its original owner, there was a sort of equality retained amid the tribes, the balance of society was preserved, and an effectual check was put upon the system of confiscation and bondage, which might otherwise have become an unmitigated feudalism. . . . With the Jubilee, however, as a political institution, we have not now to deal: our object is to show that like almost everything else in Jewish polity or ritual, it set forth in shadow the deliverances of the new and better covenant. The analogies are plenteous and significant.

If you study the history of the Jewish Jubilee, you will find—1. That IT COMMENCED AT THE CLOSE OF THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. Of the solemnities of that day, you are doubtless aware. . . . It was after these solemnities, after the prostrate knee and afflicted soul, after the ensanguined altar and the banished trespass offering, after the humbled entrance into the holiest and the exulting emergence from it, that the solemnities of the Sabbatical year began. Scarcely had the priest's voice been hushed, scarcely had the last echoing benediction from his lips reached and thrilled the furthest of the crowd, before the sound of the trumpet, caught up and transmitted through all the Jewish city, proclaimed the commencement of the year of Jubilee. Is not this a type of the way in which spiritual blessings are exclusively introduced to mankind.

There could be no Jubilee for us, a race of lost and guilty rebels taken in arms, traitors convicted of treason, unless an all-prevalent atonement had previously purchased our pardon. A criminal does not rejoice in the interval between the sentence and its execution. . . . The atonement is the exclusive source of safety and happiness for man. Apart from its reconciling provisions there is a curse upon humanity which no sorcery of the world's wizardry can charm away. And all complacency which men may feel, and all good of which they may imagine themselves possessed, are but delusive as the midnight dream. There can be no peace, or if there be it is a peace which God hath not spoken, like the treacherous calm just outside the eddy of the maelström, which only speeds the doomed vessel into the cruel eddy of its waves. There can be no hope, or if there be it will have no freedom from the blush of shame, and no steadfast anchorage by which to hold. There can be no joy, or if there be it will be a baseless and fugitive emotion, transient as the dew, but not like the dew, melting into the light of heaven. Peace and hope and joy for renovated man can come in happy jubilee only from the Atonement of Christ.

2. Among the blessings of the Jubilee there WAS REST FROM EXHAUSTING LABOUR.

By a providential arrangement, similar to that which secured a double supply of manna on the sixth day, the land had unusual fertility in the sixth year, so that in the seventh, which was the ordinary, and in the fiftieth, which was the special Sabbatical year, there was a suspension of the common duties of husbandry. Both the land and the labourers had rest, and yet the supply did not fail, for there was plenty in every barn, and there was gladness in every heart. Profane history tells and confirms what scoffing unbelief might otherwise have regarded as a tale, for we are told by Josephus, an impartial historian certainly, that in the time of Alexander the Great, there was special exemption from taxes during the Sabbatical year, and after the return from captivity the Sabbatical year was reverently and constantly maintained.

3. THE RESTORATION OF ALIENATED PROPERTY.

4. THE RESTORATION OF FREEDOM.—*W. M. Punshon, LL.D.: The Penny Pulpit*, No. 3397

ZION'S MOURNERS COMFORTED.

lxi. 3. *To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, &c.*

I. THE CHRISTIAN IN HIS SPIRITUAL GRIEFS AND DEPRESSION. Two translations—mourn *in* Zion . mourn *for* it Take both. 1. *They mourn in Zion*

(Matt. v. 4). They are real mourners. The images denote intense sorrow, as for a calamity that is hopeless. (1) They mourn the corruption of their own nature, &c. This is always described as the fruit of implanted grace. (2) They mourn over the pressure of their sorrows. The captives did. (3) Over delay of their hopes. 2. *They mourn for Zion.* Her disorders and divisions. The corruption of her doctrines. The neglect of her ordinances. The inconsistency of many of her professed friends. The comparative smallness of her numbers, &c.

II. THE SAVIOUR IN HIS GRACE. To appoint consolation, &c. 1. *A present fulfilment in the consolations of His Word and Spirit.* 2. *A future fulfilment in the fulness of the eternal glory.*

III. THE CHURCH IN HER GLORY. 1. How she appears to others. That they might be *called* trees of righteousness. Here is a rolling off of disgrace, and a recognition of her claims to be the joy and beauty of the earth (Ezek. xvi. 10–14). 2. How she expresses her emotions (ver. 10). 3. What a revenue of honour she brings to God—"that He might be glorified."—*Samuel Thodey.*

TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

lxi. 3. *Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, &c.*

CHRISTIANS UNDER THE FIGURE OF TREES. This suggests three things—1. *Life.* The tree differs from many things in a landscape, in that it has the principle of life. The rock, &c., is sublime, but it has no life. But the tree grows from feebleness to strength, and the children's children of those who plucked its leaves repose under its shade. In like manner, all men spiritually dead except the Christian. "He" only "who hath the Son hath life." 2. *Beauty.* How sterile any landscape appears from which all trees are absent, and how much enriched is any scene by their presence! The world was equally devoid of what was lovely and great in character until Christianity came. Even the ungodly acknowledge that a consistent Christian is lovely. Men of old exclaimed, "Behold how they love each other!" 3. *Utility.* The tree which the prophet had in view (for the term is specific) was the *terebinth*, or what has been called the oriental oak—a tree as famous for its important uses, as for the majesty of its form. It is not merely an appeal to the eye which a Christian makes. Let a single Christian live consistently in a family, and that family is the better for him; let there be in a country a body of consistent and holy followers of Christ, and the manner and usages of that country will become quickly improved. It is to the Christian the world has to look for the means of its renovation. Philosophy and science and literature have failed: the Cross alone can be successful.

II. THE LORD AS THE CREATOR OF THE CHRISTIAN EXCELLENCES. 1. *He gave him spiritual life.* We were first planted in Paradise, but sin outrooted us, and we lay withering and dying, ready to be cast into the fire; nor could any human, angelic, or other finite power restore us. God sent His only Son to die that we might live. He planted us in Him, and gave us new and eternal life. 2. *He supplies him with the means of growth.* When He has taken the tree and planted it in His pleasant places, He does not forget to cultivate it. What stores of instruction in the Bible; what direction and guidance in Providence; what variety of trials and temptations, suited to his changing state, are supplied! (John x. 10; xv. 2).

III. THE GREAT DESIGN AND END OF OUR BEING MADE TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. 1. God's glory and our spiritual welfare go together. The beauty of the flower, &c., are the glory of the gardener. 2. God's glory is the highest end which any created being can serve. —*Pulpit Outlines*, 1852, p. 63, &c.

I. The plant: a tree of righteousness. II. The means by which it was produced: Jehovah's husbandry. III. The purpose of this generous and skilful husbandry: "That He might be glorified."—*Geo. Bowden: The Methodist Recorder*, June 18, 1869.

Vers. 4–7. I. The land flourishes. II. The social condition of the people is prosperous. III. The people themselves are holy and happy. IV. The memory of their sorrows is wiped away for ever.—*Dr. Lyth.*

God's Priesthood *v.* Man's Priestcraft.

lxi. 6. *But ye shall be named the priests of the Lord.*

To such low purposes has the noble word of "priest" been prostituted, so vilely has it been dishonoured, and so repulsive are all its present associations, that I confess it does not seem to me any very great compliment, or anything to rejoice much about, when my text declares, "And ye shall be named priests." "Ye are," said the Holy Ghost of all believers, "a royal priesthood." This chapter has reference to the kingdom of Christ. It looks forward to the time when He should come who could say, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," &c. When He came, all earthly priesthoods were abolished, and of all members of His kingdom it was to be said, "And ye shall be named the priests of the Lord."

I. How is the office of the priesthood entered? You may glean this from the induction of Aaron and his sons into the priestly office, for they are the types of Christ's high priesthood and the priesthood of all believers. The Holy Ghost has most clearly taught by this type the order of entrance into spiritual priesthood. 1. The priests became so by virtue of their union with the high priest (Exod. xxviii. 1). And the call of Christ unto His high priesthood also includes the call of all His sons into their spiritual priesthood. The question of right to priesthood was not at all a question of personal qualities or social advantages. Carry out this argument in reference to all believers. Just as by virtue of their union and identification with Aaron his sons became priests, do you and I, by virtue of our union and identification with Christ, become the Lord's priests. 2. In the consecration of Aaron's sons to the priesthood there was not only union with the high priest, but there was also *blood sprinkling*. Christ's high priesthood rests on an accomplished sacrifice—on *blood*. What does my priesthood rest on? Why, on blood too. Not only was the blood put on Aaron, but on Aaron's sons; and believers enter into priesthood by virtue of the same blood that forms the basis of Christ's high priesthood. Unless we have the blood sprinkled upon us, we are no priests. 3. The *anointing* gives the *qualification* for priesthood. If we are believers, have not we received the anointing which qualifies for priesthood? (1 John ii. 20, 27). 4. The qualification *of garments*. They were dressed for priestly service (Exod. xxviii. 40).

II. The privileges and duties appertaining to this priesthood. 1. To *offer up spiritual sacrifices* (1 Pet. ii. 5). *Our bodies* (Rom. xii. 1); *our prayers; our praise; our intercessions.* 2. It was the priest's duty and privilege *to maintain the service of the sanctuary.* Every believer, being a priest, has equal right with every other believer to engage in maintaining the service of the sanctuary. How long shall clerical intolerance pervade the land, and how long will the people submit to it? Preach up the priesthood of believers, and the priestcraft of a clique must fall. Know of no priesthood concerning which it cannot be said, "This honour have all the saints."—*Archibald G. Brown: Penny Pulpit*, New Series, No. 750.

I. The office of God's people. Priests to intercede. Ministers to execute God's will. II. Their privileges — supply — honour.—*Dr. Lyth.*

Ver. 7. I. The present condition of God's people. Shame. Confusion. II. Their future condition. Joy—proportionate, everlasting.

Ver. 8. I. The principles of the Divine administration in His Church. God loves judgment. Hates hypocrisy. II. The mode in which these principles

are applied. God directs His people by His Word. And by the agency of His Spirit. III. The manner in which they are permanently secured. By the New Testament covenant—sealed with blood.—*Dr. Lyth.*

The Blessed Seed.

lxi. 9. *All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.*

I. There is a "seed" or race, "which the Lord hath blessed." Elsewhere it is described as "the Israel of God" (Gal. vi. 16). But it is neither co-extensive with nor confined to the descendants of Jacob (Rom. ix. 6–8; Gal. iv. 28; iii. 28; Eph. iii. 6; Phil. iii. 3). 1. This seed God hath blessed abundantly—with *peace.* Peace with God (Rom. v. 1). Peace of conscience (Heb. x. 2, 22). Peace from the assaults of their enemies (Luke i. 74). Peace amid the cares of life (Phil. iv. 6, 7). Thus there is a glorious fulfilment of the promise (Ps. xxix. 11). 2. With *purity* (1 John i. 7–9; 1 Thess. v. 23). 3. With *strength* (John i. 12; Col. i. 11). 4. With *hope* (Rom. xv. 13; 1 Pet. i. 3). 5. With *joy* (1 Pet. i. 8; Rom. v. 11). 6. With that which is the source and fountain of the peace, and hope, and joy—*an assurance of His love* (Rom. v. 5; viii. 16). Are these blessings *yours?* Are you numbered among "the Israel of God"?

II. The blessings which God confers upon His people are chiefly inward, but our text teaches us also, that there are outward signs by which those who belong to "the seed which the Lord hath blessed" may be infallibly known. "All that *see* them shall acknowledge," &c. God has distinguished His ancient people by certain physical characteristics, which have survived through many generations, and have proved indestructible by all changes of climate and condition; so that wherever any of them are found we may say with confidence, these are the children of Abraham. They differ greatly from each other, and yet they preserve a family likeness by which they are unmistakably distinguished from all the rest of the human race. And there are certain marks by which all who belong to God's spiritual Israel are as clearly marked off from their fellow-men. Such as—1. *Love for Christ.* It is one undeniable and never-failing characteristic of the believer that he loves Jesus Christ in sincerity. His love for Christ will show itself in various ways—in an earnest endeavour to keep His commandments; in a cheerful submission to all His appointments; in self-sacrificing labour to extend His kingdom and promote His glory. 2. *Unworldliness.* The Christian is *in* the world, not *of* it. 3. *Consistency.* The conformity of his life to the principles he professes. Do these marks distinguish *you?* Let it be your daily prayer and endeavour that they may become more manifest in you.—*James Harris, M.A.: Thursday Penny Pulpit,* vol. vii. pp. 373–384.

Ver. 10. I. The believer's boast. II. Determination.—*Dr. Lyth.*

The Progress of the Gospel Assured and Illustrated.

(*Missionary Sermons.*)

xi. 11. *For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden, &c.*

I. The seed. II. The extent of the ground to be brought under cultivation. III. The manner in which the fruitfulness is produced.—*Bishop Wilson: Sermons delivered in India,* pp. 395–417.

The vision of the prophet extends from the prosperous state of restored Israel to the ultimate glory of Christian Zion in the universal diffusion of righteousness and praise. We have here a beautiful and suggestive analogy between things natural and things spiritual.

I. *The life and sprouting of spring follow the desolation and death of winter.* Far deeper

is the moral deformity and death which has come upon our race by sin. Man, made in the image of God, has lost the holiness which made him one with God; is now "dead in trespasses and sins," &c. The curse of evil extends to the whole race in all its generations. The facts that show the moral condition of the mass of mankind, looked at in the light of Divine truth, and judged by the purity of the Divine law, are more appalling than any winter blight and desolation.

II. *The "earth," and "garden" bring forth their precious fruits and flowers under culture.* In nothing does man toil more laboriously against the curse than in tilling the ground. There is the same necessity for labour in the moral culture of the world. Corrupted human nature is not made to yield the fruits of holiness without toil. Every conversion represents more labour than can be made to appear to the eye. Wherever the Word of God has had free course and been glorified are found proofs of God's blessing on labour.

III. *The "earth" and "garden" cause the things that are sown in them to spring forth with certainty.* As surely as winter passes away and spring returns, seeds germinate, grasses grow, plants and trees put forth new beauty and fruitfulness, and this with a regularity that amounts to certainty (Gen. viii. 22). "So," in like manner, with equal certainty, "will the Lord God," &c. "Righteousness," lost to our race by the sin of Adam, is restored by the mediation of Christ. As sin and dishonour were joined together as a twofold curse, so righteousness and praise are joined together as a double blessing. Let the work of righteousness appear in social order and purity, commercial and political integrity; let the people be all righteous, and glory will dwell in the land. The text assures us that God will do all this. Delay is no falsification of His promise (Isa. lv. 10, 11).

IV. *The "earth" brings forth the things that are sown in it mysteriously as to manner.* Beneath the surface are subtle forces and workings of nature by which the seed is made to grow. These hidden workings fitly represent the operation of God in the production of moral results.

V. *"The earth and garden" bring forth their fruits universally.* There are sandy deserts and miry places that cannot be cultivated, but generally speaking, the earth gives her increase. With more literal truth it may be said the moral world is capable of universal cultivation. The necessity for cultivation is universal, and the Church is God's husbandry that it might be His husbandman. The Divine covenant that assured success is made with the race, not with any particular portion; and the Spirit who glorifies Christ in the work of human salvation is given to the world. If, therefore, the Church will extend the means which God has appointed, He will accompany them by His sure effectual blessing, and "cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations."—*William Jackson.*

Could anything be more incredible than prophecy of spring in winter time to a man not already familiar with the glory with which summer can clothe the world? Who can wonder that the heathen found this the divinest thing which they could imagine; that the power which drew forth these glorious hoards from the dark treasures of earth, and flung them with such royal hand abroad, was to them the most God-like God? Life rising year by year, nay, day by day, out of death. Just as incredible as spring is to winter, as life is to death, is the summer splendour that shall one day mantle this sad world.

Let us consider—

I. *The concords of the natural and the human worlds.* The worlds are one; the author is one; the life is one. One living breath breathes through both. The poet, in the highest form, is the man who can disclose the unity. The culture of the spiritual life in man is like the culture of a seed field. "Behold a sower went forth to sow." This stands as the image of the divinest work ever accomplished in this great universe. Isaiah had a keen eye for this unity. His prophecies are full of imaginative revelations of the likeness between the ways of God in nature and in man. The future of the world unfolded itself before him as the outburst of a glorious spring, a spring which should know no autumn, a dawn that should never darken into night. Yes, hopeless as it may seem, it shall be (ch. xxxv. 1, 2, 5–10).

II. *The winter of life and of the world.* All that we look upon, all that strains our pity, oppresses our sympathy, saddens our heart, and kills our hope, to the prophet's eye was but as the earth in winter—bare, bleak, stern, cold, dank, dark, tainted with decay, storm-beaten, frost-nipped, snow-wreathed, a wilderness of desolation, a waste of death. There are times when the wrong, the selfishness, the unholy passion, the bitter misery which fills the world, quite distracts us. We dream of what a home of the sons of God might be like; the life that beings made in God's image, in His likeness, might live. And we look round, and the heart sinks in utter despair. Where is the trace of it? Isaiah saw it all in his day—world and Church rotten together (ch. l. 21). But he saw something which Christ also sees beyond. He saw that it was a winter, out of which the Lord God would bring a glorious period—spring.

III. *The certainty of a future everlasting spring.* The law reigns throughout all the spheres that light shall burst out of darkness, spring out of winter, life out of death. Does the law range through all the stages of creation, and fail in the highest? Does the Lord cause the earth to bring forth and bud, and fail to touch the coldness and deadness of the winter of our world? Does man break the chain of the victorious purpose that runs through creation, and defy successfully the

Eternal Ruler to bring summer out of His winter, life out of His death? No, a thousand times no, or the world had been dead long ago. The fact that God bears it all is, knowing what we know of God, profoundly significant. It means that He sees already a tint of greenness crisping over the wintry barrenness, and foresees the day when (ch. xxxv. 1). But to an intelligent eye winter is not all desolation. There is a prophecy in every shrinking bud and blade, &c. Those see it most fully whose hearts are most attuned to sympathy with the patience and the hope of God. "The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." It is a significant collocation. Praise is the voice of joy. To be joyful man must be right—right within, right all round—that is, right with God. Right-doing makes the soul glow, as the blood glows in the rosy morning air; and as it glows it sings. Here is the principle of the reformation, the revival, the restitution, and all are images of spring. It is the turning man's heart to righteousness, to God's righteousness, to Christ. The world had once a vision of what life may grow to when man's heart is turned to righteousness by being made the captive of the Divine love. What outburst of all beautiful things, what joy, what praise was there (Acts ii. 41-47). Thus shall it be one day when the Pentecostal fire leaps from heart to heart through the great world, the world which *is* redeemed, and waits only to be renewed and restored.—*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A.: The Christian World Pulpit*, vol. vi. p. 111, &c.

Ver. 11. I. The wintry aspect of the world. II. The promise of spring. III. The power by which the change is effected.—*Dr. Lyth.*

The Heavenly Workers and the Earthly Watchers.

lxii. 1, 6, 7. *For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace. I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, &c.*

Two expository remarks. 1. The speaker is the personal Messiah (lxi. 1).

The remarkable parallelism in the expressions selected as the text should be noticed: "I will not hold *My* peace;" the watchmen "shall never hold *their* peace." And His command to them is literally: Ye that remind Jehovah—no *rest* (or silence) to you! and give not rest to Him. Christ, the Church, and God are all represented as unceasingly occupied in the one great work of establishing "Zion" as the centre of light, salvation, and righteousness for the whole world. Consider these three perpetual activities—

I. The Glorified Christ is constantly working for His Church. The greatness of Christ's work in the past may lead us to forget the true importance of what He evermore does. His present life is presented in Scripture under two contrasted and harmonious aspects—as being rest, and as continuous activity in the midst of rest (α).

II. Christ's servants on earth derive from Him a like perpetual activity for the same object (ver. 7). Note a twofold form of occupation devolving on these Christ-sent servants. They are watchmen, and they are also God's remembrancers. The former metaphor is commonly applied in the Old Testament to the prophetic office, but in accordance with the genius of the New Testament, as expressed on Pentecost, should be extended to the whole mass of Christian people. 1. *Our voices should ever be heard on earth.* With faith in Christ come responsibilities. We are *watchmen.* Let us ponder the pattern. 2. *Our voices should ever be heard* in heaven. Faith is a mute appeal to God's faithful love; and, beyond that, our prayers come up for a memorial before God. They *remind* God. The prayer that prevails is a reflected promise. These two forms of action ought to be inseparable. Prayerless work will soon slacken, and never bear fruit; idle prayer is worse than idle. 3. *The power for both is derived from Christ.* He sets the watchmen; He commands the remembrancers. And our pattern is His manner of discharging them, and the condition of receiving the power is to abide in Him.

III. The constant activity of the servants of Christ will secure the constant operation of God's power. "*Give* Him no rest." Bold words. The prophet believes that those who remind God can stir up the strength of the Lord. Practically, God reaches His end—the establishment of Zion, through the Church

The great reservoir is always full; but the bore of the pipe and the power of the pumping-engine determine the rate at which the stream flows from it (Matt. xiii. 58). We may have as much of God as we want, as much as we can hold, far more than we deserve. An awful responsibility lies on us. With what grand confidence may the weakest go to his task.

STIMULATING LESSONS. — 1. Look at the energy around us. Do we work as hard for God as the world does for itself. 2. Look at the energy beneath us. If we are sitting drowsy by our camp fires, the enemy is on the alert. It is no time for God's sentinels to nod. 3. Look at the energy above us. On the throne of the universe is the immortal Power who slumbereth not. Before the altar of the heavens is the Priest of the world. Round Him stand perfected spirits, who "rest not day and night." Do we work for God as He and all that are with Him do? Alas! have we not been like the three Apostles sleeping, even while the Lord was wrestling with the tempter in Gethsemane. Let us lift up our cry to God: "Awake, awake" (li. 9); and the answer shall be an echo of the prayer turned into a command (lii. 1). — *A. Maclaren, D.D.: Sermons*, Second Series, pp. 19–38.

(a) His session on the throne proclaims the full accomplishment of all the purposes of His earthly ministry. It points backwards to the forces lodged in the world's history by Christ's finished work,—the basis of all our hopes; it points to a future as the goal of all these hopes. But while He rests as from a perfected work, He also rests not day nor night. "The right hand of God" is significant of the operative energy of the Divine nature; "sitting" there is equivalent to possessing and wielding that measureless power. The Evangelist who uses the expression says "they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord *working* with them." The words at the beginning of Acts—"all which Jesus *began* both to do and teach"—suggest the same thought. The whole history of that book is shaped by this conviction. The Lord adds to the Church daily; His name works miracles, &c. Not the Acts of the Apostles, but the Acts of the Lord in and by His servants is the accurate title of this book. Stephen beheld his Lord "standing"—as if risen with intent to help—"on the right hand of God." John in Patmos saw Him who "holdeth the seven stars in His right hand," and "*walketh* in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." The text speaks of a continuous forthputting of power: "I will not rest." His power is in exercise as the inspiration of good men, using them as His weapons, and the axe must not boast itself against Him that heweth. He orders providences, and shapes the course of the world for the Church (1 Chron. xvi. 21, 22). The word of this Master is never "Go," but "Come." There is besides, the wonderful truth of His continuous intercession for us. His work on earth is ever present to the Divine mind as the ground of our acceptance and the channel of our blessing (John xvii. 24).—*Dr. Maclaren.*

THE FUTURE GLORY OF THE CHURCH.

lxii. 1. *For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, &c.*

I. The implied obscurity of Zion.

The modern Church is obscured—1. By its divisions. 2. By its assimilation to the world. 3. By its peculiar position as an agency in progress, working for the world's highest good.

II. The ultimate extension of the Church's glory.

This is the night of the Church's history; she is now in the shade. But as the morning sunlight bursts on the scene, banishing every lingering shred of twilight, and revealing the rarest scene of life and loveliness that was before but dimly seen, so shall her righteousness by and by appear. There are indications of the coming glory—1. In the triumphs of the Gospel at home. 2. In the salient features of the present age (see p. 333).

III. The Divine energy is pledged to accomplish the Church's future glory.

Inspiring fact! Jehovah is ceaselessly, in speech and action, working for His people. In this we have the inviolable guarantee of Zion's future glory. 1. God's Word is His voice. This voice has sounded through the ages of the past, protesting against every prevalent form of iniquity, in-

structing the nations in sublimest truths, and preparing them for a loftier destiny. Like a many-toned bell it still peals through the world in strains at once monitory and joyous. Never shall that voice be hushed till its mission is fulfilled. 2. God's providence is His action. The world is governed by Jehovah in the interest and furtherance of the higher purposes of Christianity. 3. The motive influencing the Divine energy—the love of God for Zion. God loves His Church, because He sees in her a photograph of Himself, a reflection of His own image, the embodiment and universal manifestation of His own glory. She is the fruit of sufferings unparalleled, &c. His own honour is involved in the ultimate triumph and glory of His Church.

Lessons. 1. We see the vanity and groundlessness of our fears for the Church's safety and ultimate victory. 2. We see the blessedness of consecrated service for the Church of God. —*George Barlow: The Study*, vol. iii. p. 450, &c.

THE LOVE OF THE CHURCH.

I. THE PURE AND HOLY INCENTIVES THAT MOVED THE PROPHET TO RELIGIOUS ACTIONS. 1. For Zion's sake. He loved Zion for the beauty, joy, strength, and safety she afforded the world. Analogies between Zion and the Church (Ps. xlviii.). 2. For Jerusalem's sake (see p. 436).

II. THE EARNEST RESOLUTIONS OF THE PROPHET IN REGARD TO THE DISCHARGE OF THE APPROPRIATE DUTIES OF HIS OFFICE AND MINISTRY TOWARD ZION AND JERUSALEM. 1. He resolved not to hold his peace. He was not only a praying prophet, but a preaching prophet. 2. He was resolved not to rest or cease from his ministerial labours.

III. THE WISE AND USEFUL ENDS THE PROPHET HOPED TO ACCOMPLISH. 1. The establishment of righteousness in Zion and Jerusalem. 2. The promotion of their salvation. —*Geo. Nestor: The Preachers' Monthly*, vol. vii. pp. 50–52.

The prophets were true philanthropists—their love of country was deep and ardent. The heaven-kindled passion was not quenched by afflictions however sore, or by apostasy however general. O that their mantles might fall on us! that we may experience a quenchless passion to promote the welfare of Zion. Notice—

I. THE SUBJECTS OF THE PROPHET'S SOLICITUDE. To the devout Jew "Zion" was the dearest spot on earth. Zion remains "beautiful for situation," &c. The temple which graced its heights was its glory. Type of the Christian Church (1 Pet. ii. 5).

II. THE MODE OF MANIFESTING HIS SOLICITUDE. 1. "I will not hold my peace." He resolved to lift up his voice and cry aloud—(1) Before God. Prayer the natural outlet of the believer's solicitude. Let us plead with God as did Abraham, Moses, Daniel, &c. Power of prayer. (2) Before men. There is a time to be silent, and a time to speak. Those who are deeply concerned for the welfare of Zion will be sure to speak. 2. "I will not rest." Our solicitude and activity must be ceaseless. A spasmodic and fitful zeal is unhealthy. Perseverance is nowhere more needful than in religion. Whether men hear or forbear, it should be ours to give "line upon line," &c.

III. THE BRILLIANT RESULTS DESIRED. The allusion is to a marriage ceremony, &c.—*Benjamin Brown.*

THE NEW NAME.

lxii. 2, 12. *Thou shalt be called by a new name. And they shall call them, &c.*

According to the Hebrew idiom, the name which expresses the nature and character of a person is used as equivalent to that nature and character. The promises of these verses involve accordingly, far more than appears upon the surface.

I. The new name abolishes the old. In the prophetical writings Israel's sins are very plainly described and very faithfully upbraided. The favoured people are called rebels and traitors, idolaters and spiritual adulterers. Upon their repentance, the old reproach is wiped away, and the old appellations are discarded. This is how Divine mercy treats all true penitents and believers. Former sins are forgotten, former rebukes are reversed, former sentences of condemnation are cancelled.

II. The new name expresses a new character. The Christian dispensation provides, by peculiar agencies and spiritual powers, for the renewal of the nature and the life of men (2 Cor. v. 17). In accordance with the fact is the expression of the fact; in accordance

with the new nature, the new birth, the new life, is the new name. They who were unholy become the holy people, because, from being the bondsmen of sin, they have become the redeemed of the Lord.

III. The new name is significant of a new state of favour and acceptance. Especially those upon whom the great change has passed are "the Lord's,"—His possession and property, His beloved and honoured, for whom no privileges are too great and no dignities too eminent. The new name is His name who confers it, and who delights to deem and to call His beloved ones His own."—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. p. 153.

The Church a Crown of Glory.

lxii. 3. *Thou shalt also be a crown of glory, &c.*

A very interesting promise made to the Church of God. God will not rest until Zion is as perfect as His hand can make her. Notice three things:—

I. *The Church of God is highly prized.* She is dearer to Him than all created beings. What makes her precious in His sight? No finite being can tell. Why He prized her before He visited her, is known only to Himself. Infinite wisdom can do nothing without reason: He says that He loved her, and in this truth we rest. She has no worth in herself, and is rendered precious by free, unmerited, unchangeable love.

II. *As she is so prized, she is eminently honoured.* Having paid such a price for her (1 John iv. 10), He will beautify her by all that infinite wisdom, love, and power can do.

III. *As she is so precious and so highly honoured, she shall be safely preserved.* Secure in His hands. Can any overcome Omnipotence? Then may they snatch the crown out of the hands of Jehovah (John x. 28, 29). Attempts are indeed made to destroy her. Satan tries to do so, 1. By error. 2. By persecution. 3. By snares and temptations. But she is safe (Matt. xvi. 18. See pp. 357, 558; H.E.I., 1246–1251, 2419).—*William Howels: Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 235–241.

Ver. 3. I. The estimate God puts upon His people. II. The honour He confers upon them. III. The care He exercises over them (p. 341).

Ver. 4. I. Zion's reproach. II. Exaltation. III. The occasion of the change.

Ver. 5. I. The joy of Israel at their return. II. The joy of God over them (ch. lxv. 19).

I. The rapid increase of Zion (see pp. 348, 546). II. The joy it occasions (see p. 546). On earth. In heaven.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Vers. 6, 7. The text is the Divine summons to prayer for the prosperity of the Church. It points out—

I. The persons by whom it should be presented. 1. The ministers of the Gospel. 2. The members of the Church. II. The blessings for which it should be presented. Pray—1. That the Church may be built on sure foundations. 2. That it may be distinguished by spiritual characteristics. 3. That it may be extended. III. The manner in which it should be presented. 1. It must be sincere. 2. Believing. 3. Persevering. Qualify yourselves to be the Lord's remembrancers, in the retirement of the closet, and in the assembly of the brethren.—*J. Rawlinson.*

Vers. 6, 7. I. There is always need of watchmen. II. God has never left the Church without watchmen. III. Christ's call is to all the members of His Church. How are you responding to the call?—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. p. 275.

Vers. 8, 9. God's oath. I. The matter of it. 1. The protection. 2. The happiness of His people. II. The certainty and solemnity of it. He has sworn. Who is true. By His right hand—has power to effect it (see on ch. l. 2, 3; lix. 1).—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Vers. 10–12. I. The preparation. II. The proclamation. III. The felicitous result.—*Dr. Lyth.*

Ver. 10. The work of God's people. I. Gates to enter. Of righteousness. II. A way to prepare (ch. lvii. 14). III. Stones of stumbling to be removed (lvii. 14). IV. A standard to uplift (vol. i. p. 219).—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Active Zeal in Spreading the Gospel.

lxii. 10, 11. *Go through, go through the gates, &c.*

I. The general orders of our great leader.

1. *The general order.* The Church is considered under the figure of an army in its winter quarters. From this state of comparative ease, it is called

to enter upon active service. The repetition of the charge points out the earnestness of the speaker. Activity in goodness characterises God, who sent forth His Son to seek and to save the lost; our Lord who came forth on this great errand; and His true disciples in every age.

2. *The peculiar services assigned them.* Those who are to receive the Gospel are considered as at a distance from the city, and are requiring much to be done to facilitate their approach. (1). The Jews are first mentioned. "The *people*." Isaiah constantly distinguishes the Jews from the Gentiles, by using the singular number for the Jews, and the plural for the Gentiles (*cf.* ch. ii. 2–4 with ii. 6; xi. 10 with xi. 11; and xi. 12 with xi. 16). Further the Church is to "cast up the highway;" that is, provide for them every outward means that may be useful to assist in their conversion, such as sending missionaries to them, &c. Next, "Gather out the stones," *i.e.*, remove the numerous stumbling-blocks at present in the way of that people; such as the unkind treatment, the unscriptural tenets, the ungodly lives, and the distressing immoralities of those who are called Christians. (2.) For the Gentiles an important service is to be performed: "Lift up an ensign for the peoples" (*α*).

II. AN ANIMATING ENCOURAGEMENT TO FULFIL THESE ORDERS.

This three-fold "Behold" seems to imply something on which the armies of the living God should fix their eyes with intense earnestness. Here, in fact, there is unsurpassed encouragement to missionary exertion. Of this you will be convinced, if you consider —1. The countries to which the proclamation it mentions is directed: "Unto the end of the world," *i.e.*, wherever any of the remnant of Israel are scattered. 2. The person for whom the proclamation is to be made: "The daughter of Zion," *i.e.*, the remnant of Judah. 3. The contents of the message to that people: "Behold, thy salvation cometh," &c. A message exactly accordant both to the desires and the necessities of the Jews. They have long been looking for the coming of their Messiah. They mistook Him, when He appeared the first time; for when they expected that He would come with outward pomp and splendour, not discerning that the prophet had declared that He had another work to do (*e.g.*, ch. liii; Dan. ix. 24). But still they are expecting Him. To them we are to say, "Your Saviour now draws nigh. That Jesus whom your fathers crucified," &c. Surely such a message as this is an encouragement to "go through the gates," for, if anything can touch the heart of the daughter of Zion, it is to hear that her King is coming, that her Saviour is at hand.—*J. Haldane Stewart, M.A.: A Practical View of the Redeemer's Advent*, pp. 296–315.

(*α*) The military figure used in the former part of the verse is still kept up. A standard or ensign is that implement of war which a commander raises, not only to collect his own troops, but also to bring the people, into whose country he is entering, to the allegiance of his sovereign. Hence it is that so much care is taken, in besieged towns, to keep up the standard. When that is taken, and the ensign of the besieging army is seen on the citadel, it is a signal for the inhabitants to yield themselves to the conqueror. The Christian army is therefore here directed to lift up the Redeemer's standard, that the Gentiles may be drawn to His easy yoke. His ensign is Christ Himself (ch. xi. 10). In Him there is everything to attract the soul. Upon that standard what attractive mottoes are emblazoned (ch. xlv. 22; John xi. 25; Hos. xiii. 14; Rev. xxi. 7, &c.). The standard is to be lifted up; we must let the nations see the Saviour. He has only to be clearly seen to be loved and admired. The Gospel, therefore, is to be plainly and fully preached in the largest cities, and the most open cities wherever the Gentiles are, or to whatever tribes they belong.—*Stewart.*

THE CITY OF GOD.

(*Anniversary Sermon.*)

lxii. 12. *Thou shalt be called, A city not forsaken.*

Travellers in the East have described the present desolate and deserted condition of what were once great and populous cities. But there is a city

which has not been thus forsaken, which has survived the ravages of time, the City of God, the Church of Christ. He reads these chapters in a most imperfect light who sees nothing more in them than allusions to the earthly Jerusalem and the restoration of the Jews. Several appellations are given to the Church. The last of these designations, "A city not forsaken," is fitted to suggest some suitable reflections on the present interesting occasion, when as a congregation we celebrate God's loving-kindness exhibited in our past history. We are fulfilling the prediction of the text when we make it the burden of our song that God has not forsaken His Church, that in our ancestral Zion, as in other portions of the Church, the light of life has not been quenched but still burns brightly.

I. God's presence in the Church. This should absorb every other consideration. We may reflect on the earnestness and fidelity of the watchmen who have successively occupied the walls of Zion; we may think of the generations departed who profited by their ministrations, but the thought of the Divine presence should above everything else fill us with gratitude (Ps. lxxxvii. 5, 6). What is meant by the presence of Christ in the Church? 1. It is a *real* presence. 2. This presence is *constant, uninterrupted.* 3. This presence is *perpetual.* He is ever with His people in all the plenitude of His power, in all the freshness of His grace (Ps. xlviii. 14). Often indeed it has seemed as if the Saviour's presence had been withdrawn from the Church (xlix. 14; liv. 6, 7; ver. 4; see pp. 342–345, 552).

II. The constitution of the Church. Jerusalem was a glorious city, the pride of every pious Jew, the yearly resort of the tribes. It was the centre of the nation's religious life, the rallying-point of their religious affections. Such the Church of Christ ought to be to us. It is a society of men and women regulated by the laws of Jesus Christ, and it goes in Scripture under the figure of a city, because God is its Architect and Ruler. "The one Lawgiver in the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ, and its one statute-book is the Bible." It exists for the mutual benefit of its members and the defence and propagation of the truth (1 Tim. iii. 15). The Church, then, is a witness for Christ, wherein He displays the wonders of His redeeming grace. How distinguished the honour! how lofty the privileges! how great the obligations of those who are citizens of the spiritual Jerusalem!

III. There are special occasions when this designation of the Church may be appropriately considered, such as the beginning of a new pastorate, the revival of spiritual life, the removal of hindrances to Christian activity, and the origination of some fresh enterprise. These call for thankful acknowledgment as evidences that the Church is not forsaken. And when a congregation takes the retrospect of its past history it may well cherish the same gratitude, and the reflection that it owes all to God will lead to humility and hopefulness. It is not our own effort, however strenuous, nor our own liberality, however large, that has made the Church what she is, but the presence of her King and Head.—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

The Seeking Love of God.

lxii. 12. *Thou shalt be called, Sought out.*

Without violence we may use these words of every member of the Church of God. All His children may take for their name and distinction the words "Sought out."

I. The natural condition implied in this title. 1. The Church of God was originally lost. 2. So lost that we did not seek the Lord. 3. Nor should we have ever willed to return to Him. 4. We did not desire Him to seek us. 5. Our being sought out, considering our condition, was one of the greatest wonders ever known or heard of.

II. Surpassing grace revealed.

1. That they were sought out at all. 2. The persons sought out. 3. That we were *sought* OUT. The word "out" conveys a mass of meaning. We were mingled with the mire, &c. 4. That we were sought out Divinely—by God Himself. 5. Effectually.

III. THE DISTINGUISHING TITLE JUSTIFIED. How were we sought out? 1. In the eternal purpose and work of Christ. 2. By gracious words of mercy. 3. By afflictions. 4. By mysterious visitations. 5. By the Holy Spirit.

IV. THE SPECIAL DUTY INCUMBENT UPON THOSE WHO WEAR THIS TITLE. Seeking others out. The preaching of the Gospel is not the only means. Let us hunt for souls by—1. Visitation. Take the Gospel to the people. 2. Your prayers.—*C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Nos. 525, 526.

CHRIST'S CONFLICT AND TRIUMPH.

lxiii. 1–4. *Who is this that cometh from Edom, &c.*

I. THE UNDERTAKING OF CHRIST FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF OUR REDEMPTION. We have here three leading features of it—1. His deep and solitary suffering. 2. The glorious principles on which He suffered to redeem others. "The year of my redeemed is come." Here, then, we distinctly recognise the great doctrine of Atonement—a doctrine as full of comfort to the contrite sinner as it is essential to the harmony and perfection of the Christian system. 3. The glory of the conquest He obtained. This the predominant character of the text.

II. THE MOMENTOUS RESULTS FLOWING FROM HIS FINISHED UNDERTAKING. These are threefold—1. The honours of Divine justice secured and rendered compatible with the salvation of man. 2. The judicial division of the human race into two great classes—Christ's enemies and His redeemed. To one of these we all belong. 3. The certain salvation of the one, and the fearful overthrow of the other, guaranteed by our Lord's success and supremacy.—*Samuel Thodey.*

Ver. 1. The peculiarities of Eastern imagery. The undertaking of Christ the most striking event in the dispensations of God to our lower world, &c. This great work as the text teaches is the great theme of prophecy. Viewing the text in this light, we select two points for meditation.

I. THE CONFLICT OF CHRIST in sustaining and carrying on the great work of human redemption. 1. This supposes that there were great difficulties and obstacles to be overcome before man could be restored to God's favour. 2. The text teaches that Christ was every way equal to the undertaking. They were no common resources that He brought into the field, &c. 3. That in the prosecution of this conflict He endured great and overwhelming suffering. Their solitariness.

II. THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST. It was a triumph of great principles over their opposites. The problem to be solved was whether sin or holiness, with their infinite results, should prevail, &c. This problem was solved on the Cross. 2. Really accomplished in the nature that sinned. 3. Made more illustrious by the seeming humiliation and discomfiture with which it was attended. 4. Effected by the single and unaided influence of the Captain of our salvation.—*Samuel Thodey.*

A great and glorious—I. Person. Jesus Christ (Rev. xix. 11–15). II. Work. 1. To save, &c. 2. Performed entirely of Himself. 3. Will bring more glory to God than creation. III Salvation.—*Studies for the Pulpit*, Part ii. pp. 149–152.

CHRIST A MIGHTY SAVIOUR.

lxiii. 1. *Mighty to save.*

Our subject is the all-sufficiency of Christ to save. Four points expressed or implied—

I. **The obstacles to our salvation were very great,** arising from the nature and dominion of sin. None but an Almighty Redeemer was equal to the task. The ends to be accomplished every way worthy of the instrumentality employed. There are obstacles arising—1. From the law and government of God. 2. Out of the state and frame of our own minds, considered as guilty wanderers. 3. From the world in which we live. 4. From Satanic influence. Hence it is evident

we need the interposition of One who is able to meet all the ruin entailed by sin, and to accomplish all the objects necessary to deliver alike from its bondage and condemnation.

II. The redemption accomplished by Christ is very glorious, commensurate to the entire exigencies of the case. Judge of the benevolence of the object in connection with—1. The dignity and essential glory of His nature. He blends the extremes of being in His own person, &c. 2. The provocations of those He came to redeem. 3. His deep and solitary sufferings. 4. The glory of the conquest He obtained. 5. The great principle involved in it, "I that speak in righteousness."

III. The encouragement to seek this great salvation wrought out by Christ is very ample. His willingness is commensurate with His ability. Remember this at all times.

IV. The danger of rejecting this salvation is very imminent.—*Samuel Thodey.*

I. *That the ruined condition of man required a mighty Saviour.* II. *That Christ is mighty to save.* He is Divine. Became incarnate that He might suffer, &c. The design of His mission was to save (1 John v. 11; Isaiah xxviii. 16; Matt. i. 21; iii. 17). He has done all that is necessary to save man (2 Cor. viii. 9; Phil. ii. 7, 8; Heb. ix. 24). His power to save is founded on the efficacy of His atonement (Rom. i. 4; Matt. xxviii. 18). He is "mighty to save," from—1. The law's curse (Gal. iii. 13; Acts xiii. 39). 2. The defilement of sin (Luke xiii. 1; 1 John i. 9). 3. The power and malice of Satan (Col. i. 13). 4. The consequences of sin, the fear and sting of death, the dominion of the grave, and the wrath to come. 5. Includes elevation to glory—body raised, &c. III. *What is necessary to realise His saving power.* 1. A deep conviction of ruin—that we are ready to perish. 2. A knowledge of Christ as the mighty Saviour. Sense of need. Approval of the method in which He saves. 3. The renouncement of all self-dependence, faith, &c. (Acts xx. 21; Eph. i. 13). *Conclusion.* Encouragement to the despairing sinner. How important that all should seek and secure salvation. How great the danger of those who reject it.—*Helps for the Pulpit,* First Series, p. 157.

Ver. 3. *The solitariness of Christ's sufferings.*

There is always a certain degree of solitude about a great mind. This, beyond all others, characteristic of the mind of Christ. He was profoundly *alone.* The measureless inferiority of all other minds to His. His solitariness relates to His entire life and earthly experience, but especially His *sorrows.* Not simply as being propitiatory, or of unexampled severity, but that there were connected with the nature of this mysterious sufferer certain conditions which rendered His sorrows such as no other of our race could endure, &c.

I. All His sorrows and sufferings were, long ere their actual occurrence, *clearly and fully foreseen.* II. They were *the sorrows of an infinitely pure and perfect mind.* The mind that is cast in the finest mould is ever the most susceptible of suffering. Jesus had a capability of suffering, &c., such as no soul of man besides ever felt, &c. III. It was the sorrow of a *Creator amid His ruined works. Practical reflections*—1. Gratitude for His marvellous self-devotion on our behalf. 2. Warning to the careless. What more awful intimation could be conveyed to us of the evil of sin, and of the infatuation of those who are indifferent to its fatal consequences, than in the grief and sorrow of Jesus? 3. The strongest encouragement to every penitent to rely on the Saviour's love.—*John Caird, M.A.: The Penny Pulpit,* Nos. 1925, 1926.

Vers. 4, 5. I. The helpless condition of man. II. The gracious interposition of the Redeemer. III. The sufficiency of His qualifications.

Ver. 6. I. What are we to understand by the anger and fury of the Redeemer? II. Who have reason to apprehend it? III. The impossibility of escape.

Vers. 7–14. I. God's loving-kindness to His people. He acknowledges them. Sympathises with them. Sustains them. Chastises them in mercy. When they inquire after Him restores His favours. II. The duty of making mention of it. With exultation—praise—gratitude.—*J. Lyth, D.D.* (See *C. H. Spurgeon: Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,* No. 1126.)

Ver. 7. Thanksgiving. I. *An acknowledgment of great blessings received by the House of Israel.* 1. National mercies. 2. Mercies to the Christian Church. 3. Individual mercies. II. *An acknowledgment that all these blessings were undeserved.* III. *A resolve openly and fully to acknowledge the goodness of God.* Not to be thankful is inhuman. Not to be openly

thankful is unchristian. True love for God will lead us to seek to glorify Him by a public acknowledgment of His goodness. Thus we shall bless our follow-men.—*R. A. B.*

Ver. 7. I. The loving-kindness of God. 1. Free and sovereign. 2. Rich and varied. 3. Constant and perpetual. II. Its claim upon our acknowledgment. Open. Thankful. Consistent. Exultant. Unwearying.

Ver. 8. I. God's anticipations. II. Kindness. III. Disappointment. IV. Unparalleled mercy.

I. What God does for His people. II. What He expects from them.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

The Sympathy of Christ.

lxiii. 9. *In all their affliction He was afflicted, &c.*

There is no man so great as not to need at some season or other the sympathy of his friend, &c. If human sympathy be so valuable how much more Divine, &c. Christ once suffered for us, He always suffers *with* us, &c. We have here—

I. Human calamity supposed. The text supposes that affliction may be great,—sorrow upon sorrow, that we are unable to endure the pressure of grief alone, and that adequate occasions for God's special interference may frequently occur. This was the case with the Church in captivity, &c. Human calamity is the same thing still, &c. There is an awful reality in grief, which, like an overwhelming burden, crushes the spirit and overpowers the resources, &c. Or the human mind may be burdened with the sense of guilt, personal afflictions, bereavements, &c. Who can hush the grief and afford adequate relief under all the sorrows and calamities of life. There is but One in the universe can do it, and to Him the text points.

II. Divine compassion expressed. 1. His compassion is most real and perfect. He is afflicted with the afflictions of His people. His sympathy is no imaginary consolation. He ascended in the nature in which He suffered. He knows by experience the nature of human trial, and can meet the exigency alike of real and groundless alarm, &c. 2. His aid is exerted in the most seasonable time. In His interpositions there is never any unnecessary or fatal delay. 3. There is an ineffable kindness in His dispensations which cannot be mistaken. 4. Constant and unchangeable.

Conclusion. — 1. Ascertain your title to His peculiar sympathy. 2. Carry your griefs to Him. He is engaged to relieve all the trouble, and forgive all the guilt that is brought to Him. 3. Acknowledge your past obligations. 4. Be a saviour to others (2 Cor. i. 3).—*Samuel Thodey.*

I. Divine sympathy. II. Interposition. III. Love. IV. Care.—*Dr. Lyth.*

The Friend turned into an Enemy.

lxiii. 10. *But they rebelled, and grieved His Holy Spirit, &c.*

How sad is the change described in these words. If it were the heathen, unprivileged and unenlightened, of whom this was spoken, it would not be so surprising, but that it should be said of Israel with all their advantages that "they rebelled," &c., does seem surprising (vers. 8, 9). Are we indignant at such ingratitude? May we not have cause to turn our indignation against ourselves? The history of Israel, the mercies of which are here recounted, is a mirror in which we may see ourselves. Our privileges are even greater than theirs, and correspondingly greater is the guilt of our rebellion.

I. **The surprising change in God's people in their bearing toward Him.** Even they rebelled against Him, and grieved His Spirit. The Old Testament Church had a real though limited dispensation of the Spirit. Christ is now glorified, and He is given in more abundant measure (John vii. 39). He is said to be grieved (Eph. iv. 30), resisted (Acts vii. 51), quenched (1 Thess. v. 19). But how can a Divine person suffer grief? As the revealer of truth He is grieved by unbelief and

ignorance; as the Spirit of holiness, by all impurity; as the Spirit of love, by selfishness and ingratitude. Look at some of the features of this rebellion. How are we to account for this surprising change, and what is involved in this shameful backsliding? 1. *Distrust and alienation of heart.* Open rebellion arises from secret disloyalty. In the case of Israel, we find them turning back in heart to Egypt, and murmuring against God, &c. How prone we are to revert to former sources of carnal gratification! Another fruitful source of defection in Israel was the idolatrous practices of surrounding nations. Prevailing customs have a power to drag us down, to unhinge our reliance on God, and to instigate the spirit of rebellion. Against both these influences let us be on our guard. Beware of every insidious influence that would tamper with your loyalty and trust. 2. *The influences of the Spirit are resisted.* All who live under the Gospel are subjects in some measure of these influences. He awakens, &c. But these alarms do not always issue in conversion. Souls thus roused begin to resist the Spirit, &c. But even God's people may sadly wound and grieve the Spirit by opposing His gracious work, and by the coldness and deadness of their hearts. 3. As Israel murmured against Moses, so in our rebellion *we despise Christ our deliverer.* It is the Spirit's work to reveal Christ (John xvi. 13, 14). He is glorified in the homage paid to Christ. Whatever, then, obscures the glory and sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, or is proposed as a substitute for it, must grieve the Spirit. 4. *Neglect of the means of grace.* The Word of God is from the Holy Spirit, and is used by Him as an instrument in all His gracious operations on the hearts of men. To trifle with the word of revelation, to neglect or despise it is to dishonour its Author. We cannot respect the physician whose medicines we refuse to take.

II. **The consequent change in God's bearing toward His people.** This does not imply any real change in God. The change is in His people who have revolted against Him. He is as much their loving Father now when He shows himself their enemy, as before when He showed himself their friend. If we take part with His enemies, and hold traitorous intercourse with them, how can He deal with us otherwise? Oh, the folly and ingratitude of those who having found God a Friend turn Him into an enemy. In mentioning the loving-kindnesses of the Lord (ver. 7), this is not the least of them, that in our foolish rebellions He is turned to be our enemy. How unwearied and patient is His love (Neh. ix. 17). Be faithful to your vows. It is not for you to hold traitorous intercourse with the enemies of your Leader.

—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

Ver. 10. I. The claims which arise from the work of the Holy Spirit. II. The sins which are possible against the Holy Spirit.—*J Rawlinson.*

Ver. 11. I. A grateful retrospect. II. An affectionate inquiry. III. A delightful assurance.

Ver. 12. I. God leads His people by instruments which He chooses and qualifies. II. Defends them with the arm of His power. III. Removes every difficulty that intercepts their course. IV. Glorifies His own name in their deliverance.

Ver. 14. I. God's people need rest. II. Rest is provided for them. III. God guides them to it by His own Spirit. IV. Thereby reveals and glorifies His name.

Vers. 15, 16. I. Our Father's house. Heavenly. Holy. Glorious. II. Our Father's character. Strong. Tender. Compassionate. III. Our Father's faithfulness. Survives our ingratitude — vicissitude — time. IV. Our Father's name. Father. Redeemer — from everlasting. V. Our Father's claims. Honour. Obedience. Love.

Ver. 15. I. God's people in trouble. II. Their resource. III. Their plea. Past interpositions. Past mercies.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

God's Relation to His People.

lxiii. 16. *Doubtless Thou art our father, though Abraham, &c.*

From thanksgiving and confession, the people betake themselves to earnest prayer for deliverance from sin and suffering (ver. 15). Consider God's relation to His people in two aspects—

I. As a fact most encouraging at all times, but especially in times of trouble. God's ancient people were in sore trouble (ver. 15 and others). Yet, amid all, they derived encouragement from the intimate relationships which existed between God and them.

1. *As their Father* (ch. lxiv. 8; Deut. xxxii. 6; 1 Chr. xxix. 10; Jer. iii. 4). Though this relationship was revealed under the old covenant, it was practically realised only upon the rarest occasions. Amid their trials, this is now the ground of their appeal. As their Father He must love them, and be ready to listen to them, &c. Though their earthly fathers afforded them no assistance, and seem to have ceased to feel any interest in them, they have confidence in the constancy of their heavenly Father's compassion (Jer. xxxi. 20). This is the ever deepening conviction of God's people everywhere. Gourds may grow and wither, but our heavenly Father's love neither grows nor withers—it is unchanging; it holds on and holds out, needing no sustenance from without, except that supplied by our need of it; it endures through all our unfaithfulness, &c.

As our Father—(1) He is the author of our spiritual life. By His Spirit He quickens, &c., and imparts His own nature and image (2 Pet. i. 4; Col. iii. 10; Eph. iv. 23, 24). (2) He secures our instruction. By His works, Word, Spirit, &c. (3) He supplies all our need. His supplies are suited, abundant, satisfying, inexhaustible. (4) He protects us. Exposed to innumerable perils and evils, He is our shield, &c. (5) He gives us a glorious and everlasting portion. A kingdom, a crown, &c., and bliss ineffable and eternal.

Such a relation cannot fail to be a source of unspeakable comfort to the people of God amid all their trials. *Such* a Father, ever living and loving, &c. Are *you* His child by the adoption of grace, &c.? He wants you to be His restored, obedient child, &c. "We are all the children of God," in the highest sense, "by faith in Christ Jesus."

2. *As their Redeemer* (*kinsman*). Their history was a series of remarkable deliverances. As their Redeemer He delivers His people—(1) From the bondage of sin and Satan, &c. (pp. 295, 416, 417, 438, 551). No arm but His could break the chain, &c. (2) From all their troubles (Ps. xxxiv. 19). *α.* Either in this life, in answer to prayer (Ps. xxxiv. 6; xlvi. 1, and others). At the fittest *time*, by the fittest *instrument*, through the fittest *medium*, and in the fittest *manner*. *β.* Or wholly, in the life to come. Here, then, is "strong consolation" for God's people amid all their tribulations. Troubled one, "be of good cheer!"

3. *As their unchanging Friend.* "Name"—expresses the Divine perfections. We delight to tell our cares, &c., to a faithful friend. Whoever dies, Jesus lives.

II. As a fact independent of the recognition of the greatest men.—Abraham and Jacob were two of the greatest men in Jewish history—the venerated ancestors of the Hebrew race, &c. Whether these great men knew it or not, they felt their relationship to God was a fact most encouraging. The believer's relation to God is a fact independent of man's acknowledgment, however great.

The world knows us not, because it knows not our Father (1 John iii. 1, 2). They often regard us as fanatics, &c. Nothing do they *less* understand than the elements which constitute the Christian's character and joys. As they mistake our Father's character, it is no wonder they should mistake ours (John xvii. 25; Acts iii. 17; 1 Cor. ii. 8). But whatever the great ones of the earth may think of you, if you have genuine faith in Christ, you *are* a child of God—the fact is as unalterable as it is glorious (John i. 12; 1 John iii. 1, 2; Gal. iv. 4–7). Whoever refuses to acknowledge you, steadfastly believe in God as your Father, Redeemer, &c. This is infinitely more precious than the most honoured earthly ancestry, &c. Unspeakably blessed are those who have the LORD for their Father and Redeemer. They rise superior to all life's trials, and exult in the hope of glory (Rom. v. 2). Is this blessedness *yours?*—*Alfred Tucker.*

I. The characters under which God is here addressed. (See former outline.) II. The affections and emotions of which God is the proper object. 1. Of admiring gratitude and awe. 2. Of filial confidence and trust. 3. Of earnest pleading and expostulation (vers. 15–19 and ch. lxiv.). 4. Of high and animated hope. These are not the pleadings of despair, &c.—*S. Thodey.*

Vers. 17–19. I. The sorrows of God's people. Phases. Causes. Moral influence. II. Their chastisement. Just. Administered by means of their enemies. Merciful. Cor-

rective. III. Their cure. Penitential prayer. Faith, founded on God's peculiar right in His people.

Ver. 19. God's people as distinguished from their enemies are—I. His special property. II. His privileged subjects. III. His acknowledged children.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

A Prayer for Spiritual Revival.

lxiv. 1, 2. *Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down, &c.*

It is not into the mouth of every Israelite that the prophet puts this prayer: only the true-hearted, believing remnant could offer it. Selfish grovelling souls can, perhaps, ask certain blessings from God,—health when they are sick, bread when they are hungry, deliverance when they are in danger; but that God Himself should come down is a thing which they can neither desire nor endure. They can be satisfied with what is *beneath* the heavens, while the desires of the godly aspire to what is *above* the heavens. How is it with us? May the Holy Spirit elevate our desires, and teach us that our true blessedness lies in the answer to this great petition. Whether for ourselves, the Church, or the world at large, it expresses the most urgent need.

I. The blessing which it craves. A repetition of God's former acts in their behalf (lxiii. 8–14); some manifest Divine intervention. It had long seemed as if He had withdrawn His presence, and they pray that these darkened heavens that hung over them like a pall, might be rent for a disclosure of His majesty and saving power. Is not this also our need? To the Spirit's gracious influences we must ascribe those times of refreshing, which come in answer to fervent prayer (Acts i. 8 and others).

II. The pleas by which the prayer is supported. 1. Former mercies (ver. 15). 2. A close and endearing relation is pleaded (ver. 16). 3. The disobedience and unbelief of the great mass of the nation (ver. 17). 4. The rapacity of their adversaries (vers. 18, 19).

III. The effects which its answer involves. "The mountains" of difficulty and opposition shall be levelled into smoothness; every anti-Christian power shall be weakened and destroyed. We are often hindered and thwarted in our work for God by huge mountain masses that rear their giant forms right in front of us, and seem insurmountable, rendered all the greater by the unbelieving fears and faint-heartedness of fellow-workers. But let God come down, and they are removed (Zech. iv. 7). This Divine interposition is also compared to the twofold action of fire in its destructive and beneficent effects (ver. 2, Revised Version). In spring we see fires blazing in fields and gardens, burning up the worthless prunings and brushwood, that the operations of husbandry may go forward. So, when God comes down, all that is evil, all that opposes the progress of the truth within us and around us is consumed (Luke xii. 49; Mal. iii. 2, 3).—*William Guthrie, M.A.*

Ver. 1. The power that removes difficulties. This is a cry for help and deliverance coming from the Church in the midst of conscious difficulties. Those difficulties produced by a general abandonment of God (ch. lxiii. 10; lxiv. 5–7). The remedy is found only in calling upon God, and obtaining a display of His wondrous power. The text implies—

I. That there are great difficulties encompassing the people of God.

Here compared to "mountains," because of their formidable attitude and strength.

1. *Difficulties arising from the active opposition of the Church's enemies*, organised and instigated by the great enemy of mankind. 2. *Difficulties arising from the magnitude of the work committed to the Church.* How vast all the interests at stake and the responsibility involved. Low, weak, and incapable the human instruments: how disastrous is failure! 3. *Difficulties arising from ourselves.* Our mistakes, unwatchfulness, unfaithfulness, follies, create our own worst entanglements. 4. *Difficulties arising from a common source—sin.* This severs our connection with Divine power, and forfeits the Divine approval (ver. 7). All is gone—hope, help, happiness—when God is absent!

II. That difficulties vanish when God puts forth His power.

1. *God puts forth His power in bestowing,*

imposing revelations of Himself. Here re ferred to as "rending the heavens;" "coming down." 2. *In defeating the Church's enemies.* "The mountains flow down at His presence."

III. The Power of God removes difficulties when His people cry unto Him.

1. *This is a cry of penitence.* It involves a confession of unfaithfulness, of sin, of baffled endeavours, of helplessness. 2. *This is a cry of faith.* (1) Faith in God's power to remove difficulties, or we should never pray. (2) Faith in God's willingness, or we should not persevere in prayer. Earnest, believing, importunate prayer opens the heavens, brings God near, and conquers every mountain of difficulty.—*G. Barlow.*

Vers. 1–3. I. Some of the obstacles to the prosperity and happiness of the Church. II. The power of God to remove them. Signally. Unexpectedly. Effectually. III. The encouragement He has given us to believe He will remove them. IV. The necessity of soliciting His help and interposition.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Vers. 4–8. I. The transcendent excellency of the Divine purpose respecting His people. II. The principles on which this purpose proceeds. Righteousness. Justice. Mercy. III. The utter want of merit in us. We have sinned. Our very righteousness is polluted. Our nature is frail—because of iniquity. IV. The humble determination to submit ourselves now to the will of God.

Vers. 4. I. The characters described. They wait for God—in faith, hope, obedience. II. The blessedness prepared for them. Surpasses all human experience and expectation. Is only known to God.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

God's Special Regard for His People.

lxiv. 5. *Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, &c.*

The most weighty and important of all inquiries must be those which relate to our acceptance with God, and to that description of character which He will approve, &c. The text is a comprehensive description of the character of the people of God.

I. The attributes of character by which the servants of God are known. 1. By their patient waiting for God (ver. 4). None but those who wait love; none but those who love wait. 2. By their love of righteousness. 3. By their devout remembrance of God. They remember God in the ways of His providence and grace. 4. By their fixed adherence to their principles in times of discouragement and declension.

II. The special favour with which God regards them. However they fail in securing the sympathy of men, they are assured of the effectual and sustaining sympathy of God. He meets them—1. In the gracious promises of His Word—assuring them of protection, of guidance, of support. 2. In the ordinances of His appointment. The ministry of the Word, the secret exercises of devotion, &c. 3. In the events of His providence. 4. In the season of departure from earth to heaven.

Conclusion.—1. If such be the privileges of the righteous how anxious should we be to be enrolled among their number. 2. If such be the greatness and glory of God how formidable must it be to stand in enmity against Him. All resistance is vain. Be wise! Lay down the weapons of your warfare at the cross of your Redeemer.—*Samuel Thodey.*

I. The people whom God regards. II. The grace which God displays.—*S. Thodey.*

Autumn Leaves.

lxiv. 6. *And we all do fade as a leaf.*

Men have ever been ready to associate the seasons of the year with the periods of human life: to compare our youth with the spring time, &c. We all know we are rapidly passing away, &c. Everything tells us that we are under a law of change and uncertainty, and decay and death; and my object will be to justify and account for this state of things, and to see what reliefs and supports the Gospel gives. Consider—

I. The origin of this state of things in the history of our fallen humanity. This was not the primitive condition of the race, but was superinduced and brought about by the entrance of sin. Man was not originally designed to perish like a leaf, &c.

II. The design of it. For wise

reasons God has placed us in a world of change, and under a law of uncertainty. Partly as a scene of discipline and spiritual education, and partly as a preventative against the outbreak of much depravity, which would be sure to arise from a state of changeless prosperity, in our sinful natures. We could not be trusted with unbroken happiness; and it would not be safe for us to be without the benefits which the changes of life produce. The law is universal: "We *all*," &c. Who has not lost a friend, &c.

III. THE MERCY OF THE APPOINTMENT. It is well that we do *fade* as a leaf, that we are often subject to gradual changes, as preparatory to the last great one. We might have been cut down like a tree, suddenly, without preparation, &c. The leaf as gradually fades, as it was gradually matured. God bears with much longsuffering. We ought to bless God for time and space for repentance, &c.

IV. THE IMMEDIATE CLAIMS OF GOD AND TRUTH upon you before the leaf fades from the tree. 1. Think much of the shortness and brevity of life. 2. Seek grace that you may know the day of your visitation, before life, like a withered leaf, drops from the tree, or is shaken down by the storm. "That life is long that answers life's great end." It is impossible if salvation be lost to repair by a second opportunity the loss of the first.—*Samuel Thodey.*

I. Though "we all do fade as a leaf," we do not perish as a leaf. II. We are not forgotten as a leaf. III. The Gospel cheers us in this fading condition. IV. The ripening of the soul may be going on in the midst of the fading.—*Studies for the Pulpit*, p. 107.

I. Man is *unclean*. 1. His nature is unclean. In its source, flow, fruits. 2. His righteousness is as filthy rags, mixed, defective, insufficient. II. Man is *frail* (see p. 420). Like a leaf he fades. By a natural law. Gradually, &c. III. Man is *perishing*. Like a leaf he decays. Rapid decay. Short lived existence. Certain fall. Dissolution.

Our iniquities, &c. I. Have torn us from God, as the leaf from the parent tree. II. Have destroyed our moral strength and beauty. III. Have overcome all our power of resistance. IV. Have plunged us into ruin and misery. V. Will if unchecked by the grace of God sweep us into eternal ruin.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

THE ABSENCE OF IMPORTUNATE PRAYER DEPLORED.

lxiv. 7. *There is none that . . . stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee.*

THE SUBJECT OF COMPLAINT AND LAMENTATION. Not the neglect of ordinances, or the lack of profession, &c., but the lack of importunate prayer. How wonderful the permission and privilege here implied! The meaning is obvious. Similar expressions occur (ch. xxvii. 5; lvi. 6). These are representations of one act—the act of believing with the heart unto righteousness. But this is not mainly intended, but that of those who had taken hold of the covenant for salvation none was stirring up himself to take hold of God by importunate, wrestling, prevailing prayer. It is not every kind of prayer that can be thus designated. There is a holy violence about such supplication. In prayer we take hold of God—1. By pleading His *perfections*. These constitute the encouragement of prayer. Thus Jacob, &c. God does nothing contrary to His perfections, but He is pleased to permit His people to plead these, and wait for their illustration. 2. By pleading His *relations to His Church*. What parent can hear unmoved the cry of his own offspring, &c. (ch. lxiii. 15–19). Such pleadings affect our own mind, and put us into a right frame to receive answers. 3. By pleading the *promises* of His Word. 4. By remembering *His former interpositions*. 5. By absolute *submission to His will*.

II. THE FACTS IMPLIED IN THE EXISTENCE OF THE APATHY MOURNED. 1. That few if any were striving after eminent piety. 2. That in taking hold of God we are to use appropriate means. 3. That the work is individual and personal. 4. That extraordinary methods were to be adopted—(1) Obtain solemn impressions of Divine realities. (2) Secure extraordinary times for prayer. (3) Exercise holy watching, &c.

III. THE EVILS TO BE DEPRECATED IN CONNECTION WITH THE NEGLECT

OF THIS DUTY. 1. In the dishonour done to God. 2. In the advantage withheld from the Church. 3. In the benefit we ourselves lose. 4. In our neglected obligation to benefit the world.—*George Smith, D.D.*

I. The nature of prayer described. II. The neglect of prayer deplored. III. The encouragement of prayer suggested.—*S. Thodey.* (See also G. Brooks' Outlines, p. 229–231.)

Ver. 8. God's people are distinguished—I. By their childlike confidence. II. Their implicit submission to His will. III. Their grateful acknowledgment of their dependence.

Ver. 9. I. The evil deprecated—God's anger. Merited. Acknowledged. II. The terms in which it is deprecated. Imply the justice of God's procedure. Beseech a limitation of its severity. III. The plea by which it is deprecated. Humble. Confident. Founded in God's covenant relation to His people.

Vers. 10, 11. Sin—I. Turns a scene of beauty into desolation. II. Profanes what is most sacred. III. Embitters what is most sacred in the associations of memory. IV. Destroys all that is most pleasant.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.

(*Missionary Sermon.*)

lxv. 1. *I am sought of them that asked not for Me, &c.*

It was God's design from the beginning to call the Gentile nation into His Church, and, in due time, to admit them to all the blessings and privileges of the Gospel. The Jews, indeed, were His peculiar people; but this distinction in their favour was made only for a particular purpose, and for a limited season. They were chosen especially for this end, that they might preserve in the world the knowledge of the true God, and then prepare the way for the coming of the promised Redeemer, who, when He should come, was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles," &c. It is to this great event that our text refers, as we are taught by St. Paul, who cites it as an expressive prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles (Rom. x. 20). The passage sets before us—

I. The wretched state of the Gentiles before their conversion to Christianity. Many of the Gentile nations were neither savages, nor sunk in want and ignorance, nor destitute of the necessaries, conveniences, or even elegant comforts of life. In all these respects they came very little, if at all, behind ourselves; they were rich and powerful, and produced many eminent men, whose talents and exploits have commanded the admiration of mankind. Yet they were wretched; they knew not God. "Darkness covered the earth," &c. They made no inquiry after Him, &c. Surrounded by the wonderful works of God, they yet asked not who was the maker of them. They bowed down to idols, &c. (Rom. i. 21–32).

II. The surprising and glorious change which was then wrought in them. They sought and found God. Their idols they cast away. Their vices they abandoned. A moral transformation took place in them, even more wonderful than those physical ones, which the prophet depicts (xxxv. 1–7; lv. 13).

III. The simple but powerful means by which this great work was accomplished. The Lord, by His Word, revealed His grace and glory to them, &c.

CONCLUSION.—1. We are deeply concerned in these facts, and ought to regard them with feelings of most lively gratitude. Such was once the state of this country, such, at this moment, would have been our state if God had not sent His light and truth among us. 2. The condition of the heathen nations is as lamentable to-day as it was of old. The character of the most degraded of them admits of as complete and glorious a transformation. We have witnessed these moral miracles in our own day. The means by which this glorious transformation may be effected has been intrusted to us (2 Cor. v. 18; Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). Shall we be unfaithful to so great a trust? Gratitude to God, and compassion for our fellow-men, should make us diligent in its discharge.—*E. Cooper.*

God justifies His dispensation towards the Jews because of their manifold apostacies from Him, and then shows that He had conferred His favour upon the Gentiles, who had made no application to Him.

I. Why *we must behold Him.* 1. Because our whole interests are bound up in His favour. Consider who it is that asks you to behold Him as a God reconciled in Christ. Think of the contrast between the parties. He calls a world of rebels to His footstool, &c. 2. Because He delights to raise up trophies of His grace when and where we might least expect it (see former outline). 3. Because, though He is sometimes found of those who seek Him not, He is always found of those who seek Him.

II. Where *shall we behold Him?* Everywhere; the kingdom of nature; the volume of His Word; the economy of providence; the terrors of Sinai, but specially in the cross of Calvary.

III. When, &c. Now. Always.—*S. Thodey.*

(See p. 233–240.)

Vers. 2–7. The rejection of Israel. I. Preceded by special privileges. II. Occasioned by sin. Ingratitude. Idolatry. Hypocrisy. III. Clearly predicted. As a warning. IV. Judicially sealed.—*Dr. Lyth.*

Ver. 2. The conduct of Israel excites our astonishment, but it finds its parallel among ourselves. Observe—I. God's conduct toward men. 1. Gracious. Rebels against His laws, &c., having every element of iniquity (vers. 2–4). 2. Earnest. Outstretched hands—attitude of entreaty—willing to receive to favour. 3. Forbearing—without intermission. Day of life often protracted. II. Man's conduct toward God. 1. Ungrateful. 2. Insulting. 3. Obstinate. 4. Criminal. Such a rejection of mercy must secure punishment (Prov. i. 24; Ps. cvii. 11).—*A. Tucker.*

Repudiating the Society of Others.

lxv. 5. *Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me, &c.*

There are few things in which it becomes us to be more careful than in our judgment of others, and in action founded on that judgment. Some relations in which we stand to men involve judgment of them. We are not forbidden to judge (Matt. vii. 1–5). Our text accuses those to whom it applies, of asserting their own moral superiority, and repudiating the society of others on that account. But we must discriminate.

I. There is a sense in which it is justifiable.

We are not called upon to consider all men morally equal to ourselves, nor to associate with them as if they were. We are forbidden so to do (2 Cor. vi. 14–18; 2 Thess. iii. 6). It may be perfectly true that you are holier than some who may be considered; and that fact may be involved in your very profession of Christianity. The fact of conversion involves moral superiority to the unconverted, &c. And if this wide distinction exists between saints and sinners, why should it not be professed? We need a visible organisation as a point around which the saints may gather. Such an organisation the Saviour's wisdom and grace has provided in the fellowship of the Church. Those who join that fellowship emphatically declare their separation from the world. Not only so. In the multiform relations of individual life, and in relation to many practices and principles which obtain in the world, Christians must be prepared practically to say, "Stand by thyself," &c. But

II. There is a sense in which it is unjustifiable.

It is possible to say this in an improper and irreligious spirit. It may be said—1. By the self-deceived. It may be quite contrary to the fact. The Jewish people said it. But they are solemnly charged in the verses before the text with practising some of the vilest abominations of heathenism (vers. 2, 4). Nor is theirs a solitary case. 2. By the self-righteous. They are under a delusion as to the nature of holiness, &c. Nor has the self-righteous spirit been cast out of the world. 3. By the uncharitable. They are ever quick to discern the failings of others, while their eyes are closed to their own, &c. The Church of Christ should free itself from this uncharitableness and censoriousness.

Let us place ourselves habitually in the pure light of God's holiness. Then we shall be so humbled by the consciousness of our own sinfulness as to be very tender and pitiful towards the imperfections of our brethren.

And in any case, let us see that we possess and cultivate the holiness which is assumed by those who assert their own superiority.—*J. Rawlinson.*

I. A picture of self-righteous pride. Despises others. Glorifies self. Pretends to peculiar sanctity. II. Its offensiveness in the sight of God. It offends His purity. Arouses His indignation.

Vers. 6, 7. Man's iniquities are—I. Multiplied. By personal acts. From generation to generation. II. Recorded. In God's book—minutely, accurately. III. Will certainly be recompensed. Justly. By measure into every man's bosom.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

DESTROY IT NOT.

lxv. 8. *Thus saith the Lord, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it, &c.*

"Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God." Let it not, however, be supposed that God delights to destroy men's lives, or is capricious in the bestowment of rewards and punishments. The goodness and severity of God are not contradictions in the Divine nature, but the two halves of His perfect character (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7). The burden of our text is MERCY. How many applications may we make of the words, "Destroy it not!" Let us view the passage in reference to—

I. GOD'S ANCIENT PEOPLE THE JEWS. The Jews at different parts of their history have resembled clusters of grapes, bruised, trodden down, and unfit for use. Yet God says to His Church, "Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it." Do you speak of the aversion and obstinacy of Israel? Let me ask, Wherein is the heart of a Jew worse than the heart of a Gentile? Is he self-righteous, and were not you, &c.?

II. CITIES AND NATIONS GENERALLY. Let our eye gaze on this great metropolis. But shall we yield to despondence? Never, whilst there are so many righteous men and intercessors. England has a blessing, yea, is not only blessed, but is a blessing, a blessing to the nations of the earth. And may we not believe that there are many nations God will not destroy because a blessing is in them?

III. THE STATE OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES. A review of the history of the Church will lead many persons to say it is the history of declension and revival. But alas! has there been no period which may be called the dark ages? Yet, even in these times of apostacy, God has had a people, and among them men and women of eminent piety, who had not defiled their garments. The text should deter us from yielding to despondency and inactivity.

IV. TO PENITENT BACKSLIDERS. The tree decays and falls, but still there may be life in the root, and new shoots may be sent up. So was it with David and Peter, who not only sighed and wept, but brought forth fruits meet for repentance, and whose latter end testified to the grace of God that was in them. I urge backsliders not to despair.

V. YOUNG INQUIRERS. The fruits of righteousness at first may be immature. Many young professors are discouraged by harsh reproof, and questioning as to sincerity; because one or two grapes in the cluster are imperfect some would throw away the whole cluster. Let me give you a word of warning as well as encouragement. Though Christ will not destroy the bruised reed, nor the tender grapes, yet many destroyers are around you. Your dangers may not be open persecution, nor some of the supposed formidable temptations, but a number of small, trivial, almost imperceptible snares,—little sins, falsely so-called. These are the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes. Be not afraid, none so gentle and loving as the great Vine-dresser, when even He comes with His pruning-knife.

VI. THOSE WHO ARE CALLED MOST UNPROMISING CHARACTERS. Have we never heard of a man of sterling piety, talent, liberality, and influence in the Church of God, who was once the most unruly and ill-disposed boy in the Sabbath-school, but who, owing to a kind and persevering teacher, received convictions and instructions that never were forgotten? Talk not of unpromising characters as hopeless. Did not John Newton seem unpromising when a

captain on board a slave ship, &c. Some of the so-called unpromising characters are more hopeful than many who are "not far from the kingdom of God." How infinitely valuable must be the soul of man! If you would not destroy a vine or cluster of grapes, how much less the soul. Will you, by indifference or unbelief, destroy your soul? The soul though fallen has a blessing in it. What encouragement is offered us. God is kinder than man, &c. — *J. G. Pearsall: The Christian World*, Dec. 2, 1864.

Vers. 11–16. I. Apostate Israel and their curse. II. The true Israel and their blessing.

Vers. 11, 12. Apostacy. I. Forsakes God. II. Forgets His ordinances. III. Bestows its devotion and energies upon false objects. IV. Meets with its merited doom (vol. i. p. 67).

Ver. 12. I. The gracious call of God. II. The impenitence of many. III. The inevitable result. (See p. 366.)—*Dr. Lyth.*

Incentives to Religious Decision.

lxv. 13–15. *Behold My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry, &c.*

The principles of God's conduct are the same in all ages, &c. No temptation is more common than that which arises from the impression that a life of religion is necessarily a life of gloom, &c. I urge upon the undecided some reasons for religious decision.

I. From the superior advantages of the religious life, beyond all the boasted distinctions or professions of worldly and ungodly men.

1. They have a better Master and portion. God loves to speak of them as His servants. He claims them as His own, and they rejoice in their allegiance to Him (vers. 8–15). How greatly God honours His servants! Let Christians rejoice in the Master they serve. Let the impenitent contrast the master they serve, &c. Your *master* is bad; his *service* is worse; his *wages* are worst of all. Abandon Satan's service. Become servants of Christ—here and now. 2. They have better resources and supplies. They have meat to eat which the world knows not of, and they drink of springs of refreshment which never fail, &c. What has the worldling to put over against the peace which passeth understanding, &c.? 3. They have better enjoyments (ver. 14). Religion has its conflicts, &c. But we maintain that the Christian has a large over-balance of joy. 4. They have better prospects. Even now a portion with the people of God is better than the best portion of the wicked, &c. But look at their hereafter.

II. From the peculiar sources of dissatisfaction and wretchedness to which you are exposed.

You have conscious condemnation, ever growing in evidence, &c.—*Samuel Thodey.*

Ver. 14. The Joy of God's Servants (see vol. i. pp. 234, 320, 321).

There is a striking difference between those who keep and those who forsake God's commands. The one is the object of His favour, the other of His displeasure. Those who serve God have abundant and constant occasion of rejoicing, whereas those who forsake Him exclude themselves from all true joy (vers. 13–15). Consider—

I. The grounds and reasons of their joy. God's servants have the joy of—1. Salvation (Ps. li. 12). Includes acceptance, adoption, cleansing, &c. (Rom. v. 11). What a joy is this! 2. Claiming God as their portion (Lam. iii. 24, and others). Excites joy even in adversity. The stream may be cut off, but nothing can deprive them of the fountain. 3. God's abiding presence. 4. Faith. Trusting God's care, &c. Brings peace and heart-rest. 5. A well founded hope of heaven (Rom. v. 2). This animates and sustains amid life's sorrows. In the experience of such blessings God's servants have good reason to sing for joy of heart. And if there is so much joy in the way to heaven, what transports shall they have when they come to Zion with songs, &c. (ch. li. 11).

II. The distinguishing characteristics of their joy.

It is—1. Pure and spiritual (Rom. xiv. 17; Gal. v. 22). A holy feeling, excited by spiritual objects, apprehended by faith. Suited to the noble faculties and sublime hopes of their heaven-born souls. Leaves no bitter sediment. 2. Satisfying. Such we seek. Only God's servants realise. God has so made us that no worldly joy can satisfy us. 3. Strengthening. For—(1) Duty. Gives vigour to all the powers of the soul. Not so carnal joys. (2) Suffering (Rom. v. 3, and others). (3) Christian work. Feeds zeal like

oil to the wick of a lamp. (4) Spiritual conflict. 4. Enduring (Phil. iv. 4). Does not depend upon uncertain worldly good (Hab. iii. 17–19). Lives through all the vicissitudes of this mortal life (John xv. 11; xvi. 22).

CONCLUSION.—1. Have you religion enough to make you really happy? 2. Have you to lament that it is much deadened and interrupted. Earnestly seek its increase and fulness (John xv. 11; xvii. 13). This joy beautifies, adorns, and renders attractive the Christian character. You are bound to be joyful as a means of honouring your Divine master, and being useful to your fellow-men. —*Alfred Tucker.*

Ver. 16. The happy change. I. Trouble forgotten, as a thing past. Excluded. II. Blessing secured, on earth. In God, therefore real. In the God of truth, therefore permanent. By direct appeal to God, as the sole object of prayer.

Vers. 17, 18. I. The regenerated world. Glorious prospect! The feelings it should inspire. II. The power by which it will be effected. III. The blessed results.

Ver. 19. God's joy in His people. I. Its occasion. II. Expression. Favour. Fellowship. Blessing. III. The happy consequence —the alleviation of human sorrow.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Ver. 20. "The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." I. *The shortness of human life.* A man a hundred years old is a wonder. Contrast the age of man with that of the works of nature, art, &c. II. *The long-suffering of God.* Though He sees all the sins of the sinner, and hates, and is able to punish them, He delays His stroke for a hundred years. His power over Himself. III. *The malignity of sin.* There is no self-restoring power in the soul as in the body. There are no spontaneous cures of spiritual diseases. The power of habit. Worse and worse. IV. *The inexhaustibleness of the curse.* It is not exhausted by a century, nor by a millennium, nor by the cycles of eternity. V. *The claims of religion upon the old.* Depict the dangers of hoary-headed sinners. There is still a method of escape. Accept the Saviour immediately. —*G. Brooks: Outlines of Sermons*, p. 341.

THE WORK AND ENJOYMENT OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

lxv. 22. *Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*

Connection of the text—

I. THE CHARACTER AND RELATION OF BELIEVERS. They are God's people by creation, purchase, consecration, and in virtue of the purpose of God.

II. THE WORK IN WHICH THEY ARE ENGAGED. 1. The law of labour pervades the universe. 2. The law applies to religion; God's people have work to do,—the work of repentance, faith, glorifying God, &c. 3. The law is universally applicable, the man of one talent as well as the one of ten—each and all.

III. THE ENJOYMENT THEY HAPPILY SHARE. There is enjoyment—1. In doing the work. 2. In the Divine presence and aid. 3. Resulting from the work.

IV. THE PERPETUITY OF THEIR JOY. 1. Individuals long enjoy the fruit of piety. 2. The Church will long enjoy and live and labour for posterity. 3. The redeemed in eternity will enjoy the fruit of time.—*Geo. Smith, D.D.*

SPEEDY BLESSING.

lxv. 24. *Before they call I will answer.*

Divine generosity outruns human petitions. The promise here so graciously given is illustrated practically by many instances recorded in Scripture. And many devout Christians can attest a similar readiness.

I. *The* condition *of speedy blessing.* From the language of the text it is plain that the promise is limited to those who—1. Are conscious of need; and 2. Recognise that such need can be supplied only from a Divine source.

II. *The* character, *&c.* The language used is very simple and very human. We are assured that when the petition and its spirit are acceptable, God will—1. *Hear.* This is something more than a statement of the Divine Omniscience. He will hear as a king hears the suit of a favourite or the petition of a suppliant, *i.e.*, with an attentive and favourable disposition. 2. *Answer.* This means not by words merely, but by acts. The assurance is given that God's providence will supply a want, or His grace remit a sin, or His Spirit impart needed strength or guidance.

III. *The* explanation, *&c.* If a human benefactor were in question, there would be something paradoxical in this promise. But this disappears when it is remembered who He is who makes this wonderful promise. 1. *The perfect acquaintance* which the Divine Benefactor has with the wants of the suppliant. 2. *The spontaneous and abounding benevolence* of the Divine heart hastens to anticipate the wants, to outrun the requests of those who have petitions to present and blessings to implore.—*The Homiletical Library*, vol. ii. pp. 157, 158.

I. Man needs to call upon and speak to God. II. Man is encouraged to call upon and speak unto God.—*Lay Preacher.*

Ver. 23. 1. The characters described. II. Their happiness. A blessing upon their toil. Upon their children.

Ver. 25. I. Some types of human nature. II. Their harmonious combination. Altered feelings, tastes, habits—all harmonised. III. The power by which this change is to be effected. IV. The happy issue. Peace, love, righteouness. V. The signal contrast. In the serpent and his seed.—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

The Objects of the Divine Favour.

lxvi. 1, 2. *Thus saith the* Lord, *the heaven is My throne, &c.*

In opposition to their formality, &c., a great truth is here asserted; viz.: That the special object of Jehovah's gracious regard is the contrite and lowly spirit, who, with reverence and godly fear, offereth to Him sincere spiritual worship. This truth is unfolded in a threefold aspect—I. By way of reproof. 1. The pernicious notion that merely ritual and external service is acceptable to God is denounced and condemned. The reproof of the text is equally applicable to all that is unspiritual in religion at the present day—all heartless formality and Pharisaic ritualism. 2. *Self-righteous pride is here rebuked and condemned.* The Jews prided themselves in their splendid temple and their gorgeous ritualism. II. By way of instruction. I. The text implies that the God of nature is likewise the God of grace and salvation. There are some who profess to worship the God of nature, but who ignore and deny the God of redemption in Christ. They are one and the same. 2. The human soul, in its sinful and degraded state, is an object of greater interest and value in the sight of God than all the material universe. 3. God's gracious and approving regard is connected with a specific state of mind on the part of man. III. By way of consolation. Consolation to a man of a poor and contrite spirit. 1. God looks upon the contrite spirit—(1) To heal its anguish. (2) To enrich and exalt him. (3) To comfort and protect him. (4) In approbation of their worship. Pomp and pageantry he spurns, &c. (5) To dwell with him for ever. Let the ungodly remember that God looketh upon them also, but not with pleasure and approbation.—*E. Roberts: The Penny Pulpit*, New Series, No. 787.

I. Man's look (Micah vii. 7). Man needs help. Where is he to look? 1. Personal. Whatever it may cost, whoever else will not, I will. 2. Reliance—"unto." In weakness, confusion, difficulty. 3. Object—"the Lord." He is able, willing, has promised to help.

II. God's look. 1. God has promised to look, *i.e.*, after. "I will." His look is one of power, and it means help and protection. 2. Object—poor, needy. "Him that hath no helper" applies both to temporal and spiritual concerns of God's people. 3. Contrite, repentant (ch. lvii. 15). 4. One who has reverence for God's Word. Tries to keep it; fears to break it. Let us look to God, and God will look to us.—*John R. Taft, M.A.: The Study and Homiletic Monthly*, 1879, p. 163.

I. The character of those who are the peculiar objects of the Divine regard. II. God's regard to such characters. To turn away the face is expressive of disgust, disdain, &c.; to look is to approve, to care, to bless. The text expresses Divine approval, care, blessing. *Conclusion:* 1. How different the characters whom God esteems to those the world delights in! 2. What admirable condescension in God (Ps. viii. 3–5). 3. What encouragement to the penitent (1 John i.). 4. What a source of terror to hypocrites, pharisees, &c.—*R. Watson: Sermons and Outlines*, pp. 285–288.

I. God's grandeur. II. Self-sufficiency. III. All-sufficiency. IV. Condescension.

Ver. 3. Formal worship. I. Its features. II. Offensiveness to God. III. Utter worthlessness (pp. 625–627).

Ver. 4. I. The offence. Impenitence—aggravated transgressions, wilful contempt. II. The punishment. Delusion, fear, ruin.—*J. Lyth, D.D.* (See outlines on lvii. 15.)

Acceptable Worship.

lxvi. 5. *Hear the Word of the Lord, ye that tremble, &c.*

In all ages, true and false professors of religion have been found within the precincts of the Church. So in Isaiah's time, &c. The hypocritical party, instead of being humbled, &c., grew bolder in sin, and presumed upon their

outward relationship to God. But the prophet reminds them that the worship of God must be suited to His nature—spiritual, &c.

I. *The distinguishing character of acceptable worshippers.* This fear arises from—1. Their tender love and reverence for the Author of the Word. 2. A settled delight in the holiness of that Word. 3. Produced alike by the terror of the threatenings and the sweetness of the promises.

II. *The special regard which God pays to them.* 1. He looks upon them. 2. He dwells with them. 3. He vindicates their cause from the rebuke of enemies. 4. He brings them for ever to dwell with Him.—*S. Thodey.*

Travailing for Souls.

lxvi. 8. *As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth, &c.*

That we may obtain a clear, comprehensive, and impressive view of the doctrine involved in this declaration, let us inquire—I. *What does this travail of the Church imply?* Intense prayerful desire for the salvation of souls; a strong and unwavering faith that souls will be saved when the right means are used, &c. Will manifest itself in various ways. The Word of God, and the annals of the Church furnish numerous and stimulating illustrations. What do *you* know of this travail? II. *Why is it necessary?* 1. God has so appointed it. (1) It is the order of nature. Lies at the basis of all secular success—if there be no labour there will be no profit, &c. (2) As in the natural so in the spiritual world. The history of the Church is a continuous illustration. Equally true with individuals. 2. The appointment is highly advantageous, *e.g.*—(1) Exercises the graces. (2) Qualifies for the proper nurture of the offspring. III. *How can it be realised?* Not by simply desiring it, &c. Such is the constitution of the mind, that if you want to awaken concern respecting any subject, *you must fix your attention upon facts adapted to induce it.* No lack of facts suited to awaken intense longing for the salvation of souls. When this concern is awakened, take care that it is cherished. IV. *What will be the result?* The rapid increase of the Church (see context). When the Church is really anxious for conversions to *Christ*, sinners will soon become anxious to be converted. What a privilege and responsibility is placed in our hands! *Conclusion:* Are you deeply concerned for *your own* salvation, &c.? (See Dr. Jenkyn's, "The Union of the Holy Spirit and the Church," pp. 265–288; C. H. Spurgeon, "Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit," No. 1009.—*Alfred Tucker.*

Vers. 8, 9. I. Zion's increase. Unprecedented. Sudden. Extensive. Certain. Continuous. II. The effect of Divine power in conjunction with human efforts.

Vers. 10–13. I. The consolations awaiting Zion. II. The joy of those that love her.—*Dr. Lyth.* (See outlines on liv. 1–3; lx. 8.)

Divine Consolation.

lxvi. 13. *As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, &c.*

I. The consolation promised. 1. Divine in its origin. 2. Rational in its nature—intelligent, consistent with reason, as well as according to faith. 3. Free in its bestowment. 4. Select in its subjects.

II. The manner in which consolation is afforded. Not as a stranger, friend, &c. None comforts as a *mother*—1. The affection of a mother is warm. 2. The care of a mother is indulgent. 3. The attention of a mother is prompt. 4. The condescension and self-denial of a mother is great. 5. The assiduity of a mother is unwearied. All this instructs us in the Lord's tenderness and patience towards His children.

III. The means by which consolation is enjoyed. "In Jerusalem." This teaches—1. The importance of separation from an ensnaring world. 2. The propriety of regular attendance on religious worship. 3. The duty of church membership. 4. The worth of a right spirit in attending Christian ordinances.

But the language of comfort must not be addressed to all (ch. xlviii. 22; lvii. 12).—*J. Kidd, Fifty-three Sermons*, pp. 296–302.

Vers. 13, 14. *Divine Comfort.* I. The people of God often stand in urgent need of comfort (pp. 1–4, 406). II. The source of the most endearing and efficient comfort is God Himself (see other outline on this passage; also pp. 1–4, 407). III. The Divine comfort is especially imparted in the sanctuary. 1. Appointed for His people to wait for and receive comfort. 2. The faithful discharge

of sanctuary duties yield comfort. 3. The sanctuary is the place where God's comforting presence is specially manifested. "The Holy Ghost the Comforter." IV. The bestowment of Divine comfort inspires them with grateful and exultant joy (pp. 407). *Conclusion.* 1. Do you belong to the privileged community God Himself shall comfort? "Many sorrows shall be to the *wicked.*" 2. The duty and privilege of God's people to seek Divine comfort amid all their trials. 3. Those who are Divinely comforted should seek to lead others to the same source of consolation (p. 407).—*Alfred Tucker.*

The Lord's Hand Revealed.

lxvi. 14. *The hand of the* Lord *shall be known toward His servants.*

I. *Some of the ways the hand of the Lord makes itself known toward His servants.* 1. In the character they bear. 2. In the work they do. 3. In the sufferings they endure. 4. In all the triumphs of their faith and patience.

II. *The condition of this visible display of God's power.* Simply to let it operate upon us and through us. We can, and often do, prevent His hand from being known. There must be humble receptiveness, believing prayer.

III. *The effects of this manifestation of the Lord's hand.* 1. It encourages the Lord's servants. 2. It rebukes the unbelief of the ungodly. *Conclusion.* Unconverted sinner, the Lord *desires* to show forth the power of His grace in you. Will you not allow Him to work upon you His miracle of saving power? (See outlines on ch. l. 2; lix. 1).—*W. Guthrie, M.A.*

Vers. 18–24. The ultimate issue of God's judgments. I. The revelation of the Divine glory in the sight of all nations. II. The universal proclamation of truth. III. The enlargement and perpetuation of the Church. IV. The constant and universal celebration of the Divine praise. V. The everlasting shame and misery of the wicked.

Ver. 23. I. God is the only true object of worship. Spiritual. Regular. II. His worship shall become universal. III. Shall be constantly perpetuated. What a great work the Church has before it!

Ver. 24. I. The wickedness of the wicked. II. Its punishment. Certain. Terrible. Without alleviation or hope. III. The perpetuation of its moral lessons. (See also "Gatherings from a Ministry": John Milne, pp. 229–236).—*Dr. Lyth.*